HOPE FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE

APPLYING JUERGEN MOLTMANN’S ESCHATOLOGY.

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By

John Peter Byles

BSC (Forestry), BD, MA in Biblical studies (Apologetics), BTheol (Hons).

School of Theology
Charles Sturt University

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Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

We are all living longer. Within the last century the average lifespan in Australia has risen from 55.2 years for men and 56.5 years for women to 79.7 years for men and 64.2 years for women. This situation is typical of societies in the Western World. In this world aging people find unique threats and fears. Coupled with the ageing of society is a pervasive atmosphere of depression and anxiety.

This thesis is a theological inquiry. It reaches back into the Christian tradition to see what hope is relevant for the present generation. Juergen Moltmann is the leading thinker who not only discovered hope for himself but has sought to promote it and still does promote it, through his study of eschatology which, for him, is the focus of Christian theology.

Many attempts have been made over the centuries to find hope, ranging from various utopias to extension of human life. The grim spectre of mortality and frailty of human nature have negated these attempts.

This thesis looks at the hope of immortality and finds that it is inadequate.

We then turn to God to find hope. Moltmann found hope in a devastating period in his personal life and that the Christian God is not a remote deity, but One who is involved with His creatures. He is a promissory God who has promised eternal life.

Moltmann stresses that this eternal life is not the survival of the soul which is a Platonic idea but the resurrection of the body.

Moltmann concludes by arguing for a re-created universe.
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Hope for Ageing People

Applying Juergen Moltmann’s Eschatology

Chapter 1

Coming to Terms with an Ageing Theology.

We are living in a time when more people are living longer. Life expectancy has increased over the centuries, from an estimated 28 years in ancient Greece and Rome to 78 at the start of the 21st century (Mortality, 2010). In Australia, in the period 1901-1911, men lived to 55.2 years women to 58.5 years,1 but almost a century later men can expect to live 79.7 years, women to 84.2. Assuming that current rates continue by the next half century men can expect to live to 92.1 years, women 93.6. (A.B.S. 2013 p.5). This data compares favourably with the rest of the world. (A.B.S, 2013 p.13-14).

The fabric of society is rapidly changing in a profound way. Don Aitken has shown how the fabric of Australian society has altered over the last 50 years to a diverse, multicultural society. Not only has the structure of society changed but the ethos and attitude of Australians has dramatically changed. While he does not specifically mention generational issues it is arguably the case that Western cultures are emphasizing the quality of youthfulness to the detriment of old age. Nevertheless, with high youth unemployment it is a known fact that young people are under pressure for jobs, which the older generation did not have. Globalization has impacted on

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1 Much of the statistical data used in this thesis will be cited from Australia although the trends are typical of many developed countries.
universal trends and values. The present and youth are emphasized to the detriment of older people. Those born after 1945 – known as the baby boomers - are demanding the best and ageing\(^2\) takes place in a culture which emphasizes youthfulness.

With respect to the aged there is within modern Western societies a very substantial industry. It includes medicine, pharmaceuticals, further education, travel and entertainment, catering and all aspects of geriatric nursing care. This industry has heavy investment in facilities for ageing people such as retirement villages, nursing homes, hospices, and superannuation funds. These facilities have emerged to serve an ageing population. The industry has become both highly regulated and very competitive. It is subject to marketing strategies which are designed to overcome the daunting costs involved and any stigma or fear attached to declining personal capacities. The reality of ageing is often masked in the language of care, activities and even the naming of agencies.

In Australia home and community care packages, Extended Aged Care at Home packages (EACH), were set up in 1984 to help older people live at home. Yet there have been an increasing number of people placed in residential care “in 30.6.12 there were 252.980 operational aged care places, an increase of 40% since 2002” (Department of Health 2013).

Provision for all of these services has necessitated numerous conferences, enquiries, reports and publications, both overseas and in Australia. Examples of such are the 1974 U.S.A. Presidential conference on aging (Hiltner, 1977), the Southern Baptist conference oin aging in 1974 (Stagg, 1985), and a similar one in the American Lutheran Church in 1992 (Kimble, 1995). In Australia the Senate held an inquiry into superannuation in 2003 and the then Commonwealth treasurer, Peter Costello produced an intergenerational report (AIHW, 2007). In 2003 the

\(^2\) English and Australian texts spell this word ageing: American ones aging. In this dissertation I will prefer the English ageing unless citing from an American text.
Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a survey of ageing and carers (SDAC) (AIHW, 2007). The annual BEACH, bettering the education and care of health, surveys were produced after 2001. The Australian Department of Health produced some ten documents in 2010 concerning various aspects of care for ageing people\(^3\). There are also the biennial reports of the Australian Health and Welfare Institute regarding the health of Australians, including the elderly, and documents such as the 2007 AIHW *Older Australians at a Glance*. Various departments have provided official websites containing matters relating to health and ageing. In 2013 the Australian Productivity Commission and advisory body to the Commonwealth seriously recommended raising the pension age for all Australians to 70.

There has been an increase in age-related diseases. For example, dementia is one of these diseases which affects many people over the age of 65: “In 2011 there was an estimated 298,000 people living with dementia in Australia. Among Australians aged 65 and over, almost 1 in 10 (9%) had dementia.” (Department of Health – updated 31.7.2013). It is one of the reasons why aged peoples seek residential accommodation. Similarly, Parkinson’s disease, which is a disease affecting the nerve cells of the brain and, for which there is no known cure, affects some 80,000 people in Australia, the great majority of those afflicted being over 60 years of age.

The term “ageing” simply means either “growing old, or giving the appearance of advancing age’ (Moore, 2004 p.126). Ageing is a process involving changes over time and leading to an increased risk of debilitating disease or death.; A medical definition of ageing could involve a weakness or of physical decline. MacKinlay (2011 p.14) considers that history and culture make it difficult to determine what is old, thus there is an element of vagueness in determining what might be regarded as old. Current thinking could support this concept, for while the term “old” was one considered to be 65 years, this age may not now be relevant. Historically, a person who

\(^3\) Such as encouraging best placed for residential care, outlining Medicare items for G.P.s, Guidance for oral health in residential care, details and procedures for admittance of elderly people to residential care.
survived to what we now consider to be middle age was considered old. Robert Katz (1977) considers that the idea of ageing is ambiguous something which is not precise, as people age at different rates. Gerontological literature does not give precise definitions of old age. Hiltner (1977) focuses on those over 65, Jewell (1990) and Clements (1990) refer to the third and fourth age - the seventh and eighth decades of human life.

Helen Small, in *The Long Life*, examines the philosophical basis of old age which she defines “as the later years of a long life where there is an inevitable and irreversible deterioration in the organism as a consequence of age” (Small, 2000, p.3) It is a subject about which much has been said but about which there is little serious thinking. She concludes by saying “Old age is a subject … with much wider dimensions”. (Small, 2007 p.272) She refers to a life nearing the end of its possible life span and how, she asks, it is to be “reconciled to the proximity and inevitably of death…is death just the ceasing of bodily functions?” (Small, 2007. p.1.)

The primary interest in this thesis lies on the process of ageing which transcend human life. It is in the way of ageing which is necessarily related to mortality, the two cannot be easily separated. The way in which the two are linked becomes obvious through the frailty of health and friends. It is at this point that the Christian faith needs to consider the link between ageing, mortality and the nature of Christian hope. Now this is not to say that mortality is related to senescence. That is simply not true; the whole of life is susceptible to decay and death at every stage. There is nevertheless a particular binding of increasing age to mortality through what Small refers to as the ending of the possible and the inevitability of death. The two are proximate. It is no surprise then that the practical and theological questions should arise as this is the nature of Christian witness to the experience of growing older, the meaning of death, and how these experiences relate to a doctrine of hope. Here hope will have several dimensions. The first has to

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4 As, for example, the age at which people retire.
do with what Goldsmith refers to as ‘blessings’ and grace which may indeed triumph over the physical and mental limitations expressed through various infirmities and diseases. The second may flow from Small’s recognition of how the western philosophical tradition has often associated being older with wisdom. In this instance what can hope accumulate through experience with regard the future and well being of generations to come? Of particular importance for this thesis is what might be the nature of Christian hope which often lies beyond mortality and limitations of such may inform the spirituality of those who are ageing.

The very nature of Christian hope links ageing and mortality together. In practice it is not possible to separate the two themes. These links between aging, mortality and Christian hope is captured in biblical and subsequent Christian spirituality. One example of this is the Nunc Dimittis, where the aged Simeon, who seeing the Christ Child, was ready to die ‘‘Master, now you are dismissing your Servant in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for your people Israel.” (Luke 2.29- 32). It is not uncommon to find the following Psalms used in a funeral service; Psalm 80. 4, “a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past” and 1 Peter 1. 24- 25, “all flesh is like grass and its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower fails, but the word of the Lord abides forever”. In the words of a hymn used in worship:

Time, like an ever rolling stream
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day (Salvation Army 1996 p. 11)

A prayer used at a funeral service is: “O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world lies hushed, and the fever of life is over and
our work and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at last.”

As for the Australian scene, AIHW includes all people over 65 in their 2007 survey of ageing. However, they also incorporate data from a younger group - those from 50 to 64 in that survey. They recognize that the over 65 age group is extremely diverse. Robert Hill (2005) considers that healthy living is possible well into later decades. Unlike younger people who have distinct ages at which activities can take place – at 17 a young person can get a learner driver’s license, at 18 legally buy alcohol, vote and even get married - there are nowadays no distinct ages at which an older person may achieve something, other that in Australia becoming eligible for an old age pension, or becoming entitled to certain tax offsets, or the privilege of accessing one’s superannuation.

Literature on ageing, religion, and spirituality has emerged since the various American conferences in the 1970s. In Australia official enquiries seem to have led to more equitable relief for ageing people, as the increase in pension levels, which occurred in September 2007, demonstrated.

The rise in the level of ageing in the population naturally gives rise to concerns for medical care and the intersection of personal and social well being. The general tendency of ageing is towards levels of futility and, as such, it raises questions to do with the quality of life. Hugh Mackay in The Good Life (2013) has identified the good life as a universal attitude of doing to other people as we would like to be treated.

There has been an interest in the spirituality of old age. Malcolm Goldsmith is one writer who has written many books on ageing, with particular interest in dementia. In response to the second international conference on ageing, spirituality and religion, in 1966, he wrote a book on
dementia *Hearing the Voices of People with Dementia: Opportunities and Obstacles*. Albert Jewell’s *Spirituality and Aging* is an edited collection of papers on the subject. There is also a UK website – http: www.faith in older people.org.uk/- which expresses spirituality among older people. Elisabeth MacKinlay has edited a book entitled *Ageing, Spirituality, and Pastoral Care*. In recent years the Centre for Aged Care and Pastoral Studies provides education and research into spirituality with ageing and pastoral care of older people, as well seeking to promote the interests of ageing people. In addition, the Centre seeks to develop policies relating to ageing as well as sponsoring a significant amount of material on ageing and spirituality. This organization has links with similar ones overseas, as well as Charles Sturt University and St. Mark’s Theological Centre in Canberra.

Is it not yet time to add an extra dimension, to construct an appropriate theology for ageing people? This is not such an odd enterprise. The practice of an explicit contextual theology first began to emerge in the 1970s. The actual name ‘contextual’ was first employed by the Taiwanese theologian, Shoki Coe. The initial focus was on how non-Western cultures might express faith in the light of a very different experience. Stephan Bevans in his 2002 work, *Models of Contextual Theology*, has identified well how experience and its priority is acquired in a central role in any contextual theology. Writing in 2004, in *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Daniel Migliore has noted that a contextual theology emerges for one of several reasons. These include the experience of suffering and injustice, the denial of voice, or the failure of a conventional systematic theology to engage with the issues and the quest for meaning which are not of a specific context. Writing in the *Cross in our Context* in 2005 Douglas John Hall, has suggested that context must engage with matters of time and place. For Hall place is not just a geographical location. It can also embrace
rank and station in life. The very nature of what is contextual presupposes levels of plurality, and as Bevans has demonstrated, models of theology.\(^5\)

Significant work has been done of various theologies relating to different stages of life. One such contextual theology, edited by Kenda Creasy Dean in 2001, contains the contributions of some twenty-two writers on the subject of pastoral ministry for youth. Evelyn Parker, one of the contributors in that volume, describes the hopelessness of youth, with a lack of parental love, teenage pregnancies and teenage suicides involved with drug and alcohol abuse, problems of growing up, influence of Satanic cults and infection with AIDS. She writes, “They (youth) … cry out for the church to proclaim a relevant Christian hope for teenagers” (Parker, 2001 p. 266). Yet she feels that the church presents a spirituality which is impotent through failing to recognize the activity of God in the midst of evil, as well as a spirituality which lacks coping skills to enable youth to cope with their disappointments and tragedies. Parker argues that there is the need for a theological framework for youth which needs to recognize that God is present in the midst of suffering and evil, and there are spiritual disciplines which are needed in the face of hopelessness and tragedy. As well, there are those adequate coping skills can be learnt by youth including spiritual disciplines.

In 2004 Dean wrote a further work *Practicing passion: Youth and the quest for a passionate church*, exploring passion in relation to ministry to parents of adolescents, which stressed the need for passion from the churches to match the extreme passion of youth:

In the quest for a passionate church, young people prod us to be more than we have become. They only ask that we who say we are the people of passion, who live for a love that is “to die for”, and who ask them to do the same. Youth ministry so conceived transforms young people - but it also transforms the church (Dean, 2004 p. 257).

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\(^5\) Juergen Moltmann also discusses them at length in his various books.
Other contextual theologies relate to children’s ministry and to counseling in marriage. There is a relative dearth of theological work when it comes to ageing. Such neglect sits ill at ease with how older age is venerated within the Bible. One key text here is Frank Stagg’s 1981 work, *The Bible Speaks on Aging*. Stagg is best known as a ‘progressive activist’ in Southern Baptist cultures in the United States. His overreaching concern is with how the Bible is relevant to contemporary life. He wrote on a variety of current lives, including civil rights, gender equality, Vietnam, the first Gulf war, ecumenism, and ageing. He was essentially a New Testament Scholar. But his work on ageing concerned the whole Bible. He examined the text of the Bible book by book to see what each of the Biblical authors had to say about ageing.

There are significant sections of the biblical tradition where ageing is not an issue. These include the books of Exodus, 1 Kings, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum Habakkuk, Zephaniah in the Old Testament and the Synoptic gospels (with the exception of the Lukan nativity stories), much of the Pauline literature as well as the Apocalypse.

The longevity of the antediluvians is well known: Methuselah, the oldest recorded human life, lived to 969 years, Seth 912, Enosh 905, Kenan 910, and Noah 950 according to a literal reading of the Genesis text. Similarly, the patriarchs enjoyed long lives: Terah 205, Sarah 127, Abraham 175, Ishmael 137, and Isaac 180 years. Gideon, Samuel, and David lived to a good old age.

There are two significant passages relating to ageing. They are: Psalm 91:16 “with long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation”, and Psalm 21:4 “He asked for life and you gave it to him - length of days forever.” These passages indicate that it is the divine prerogative to bestow long life, and that longevity is a gift from God to be enjoyed.

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6 Whybray considers that there are similarities to Mesopotamian texts and also that the writer of the Genesis saga wanted to show that antediluvian people were different to the current population.
In a similar vein 1 Kings 3.14 God promises Solomon a long life if he continued to obey Him: “If you walk in my way, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.” The fifth commandment promises a long life as a regard for obedience, “Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). Respect for the aged and reverence for God are linked. Proverbs 16: 31, “Grey hair is a crown of glory. It is gained in a righteous life”, is often cited to claim that God promises longevity for those who live righteous lives.

The older people, and particularly parents, had a responsibility to teach the younger generation the commandments and laws of God (Deuteronomy 11:19). In the book of Proverbs, the young are exhorted by their parents – for example, Proverbs 3.1: “My child, do not forget my teaching”. Old age is virile according to Psalm 92:14: “In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap” talks of the fruitfulness of old age, (which echoes Psalm 1:3). In the Old Testament the older people held wisdom, the Elders were the leaders of ancient Israel and a father’s instruction and discipline were to be valued by the young. The aged were the conveyers of wisdom (Job 12:12). In the nativity stories pious older people, Zachariah, Elisabeth, Anna, and Simeon rejoice in the news of the Saviour’s birth, while the beloved disciple lived to a ripe old age, referring to himself as the “elder” (ii John 1, iii John 1). Paul was the spiritual father to Timothy, continuing in ministry into what was considered in those days to be old age, “ and “I, Paul, do this as an old man and now also as a prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Philemon 1:9).

The Bible does not ignore the failures of age, Old age does not guarantee immunity from spiritual and moral failure, such as that of Eli (1 Samuel 3.10f) and Solomon being led astray by his many wives (1 Kings 11).

On the whole, however, the Bible generally exhibits a high respect for older people and honours old age for its accumulated experiences of life and great wisdom. Stagg concludes by
saying, “The Bible has no kind word for people who are unkind to children or to the elderly” (Stagg, 1981 p. 185).

By way of comparison, theology has often consigned older age to the developing field of pastoral care and the practice of ministry. One early text is Brynoff Lyon’s 1985 work *Toward a Practical Theology of Aging*. He draws his insights from Patristic and Reformation theologians, such as Augustine, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose, Calvin, Richard Baxter, and William Bridges. In general terms Christian theologians have followed biblical concepts of ageing. Lyon is saying that there is an unlimited potential for elders to achieve something useful for God.

Firstly, all agree that old age is a blessing from God. The foundational texts here are Psalm 16:1 and Exodus 19:32. However, they are well aware of the problems and infirmities associated with old age, including the fact that not all elders are virtuous. There are a variety of theological attempts to reconcile these problems, such as Calvin’s idea that infirmities encourage people to trust God more deeply.

Secondly, all can find a valid religio-ethical witness in old age, including the responsibility of teaching the younger generation the basic facts of Christian practice as well as self-examination and meditation: Lyon comments, “there were quite clear expectations of older adults contributing to the potential fulfillment of younger generations.” (Lyon, 1985 p. 49)

The third point that Lyon makes is that older theologians believed one’s senior years were a time of spiritual growth. They felt that in old age the sensuality of youth and younger years had abated, leaving older people to find time for the cultivation of their souls. This sort of thinking has extended into modern concepts of spirituality, to which I will refer later in this thesis.

Yet there seems to be a limited attention given to efforts to construct theologies relating to ageing. Much of the literature concerning theologies of ageing relates to spirituality and ageing or
ministry to senior adults and some devotional material. Melvin Kimble found in the 1980s that there was a dearth of material on religion and spirituality among the ageing. His 1995 work *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: a Handbook* contains articles written by multi-disciplinary and varied faith contributors who expound the attitude of differing faith perspectives to ageing. While there are some areas of disagreement between them, there are some issues where there is agreement. These include: the fact that ageing involves contemplation of one’s death, and that there is potential for spiritual growth as people age. Kimble concludes that religion and spirituality is very much a part of successful ageing, commenting “the complex and dynamic relation between being and doing forms the foundation for theological reflection on aging” (Kimble, 1995 p.385). Lois Kutson’s 1979 work, *Understanding the Senior Adult*, has some articles on dying, on biblical references to ageing but is mostly concerned about the need for a structured church ministry for older people, including some suitable liturgical material. She does provide a number of websites concerning ministry for older people including two sites which offer academic teaching in aged care. Martin Heinecken and Ralph Hellerich’s 1975 book, *The Church’s Ministry to Older Adults: A Theological Basis*, seeks to provide workers within the Lutheran Church of America a theological basis for pastoral care for senior adults, stressing the unconditional love of God for all, the role of the Church in advocacy for justice for elders, respect for age, and that mortality which elders feel. Their aim is to create caring congregations of good fellowship which includes older people. Their work is good basic theology, but it is aimed for pastoral care rather than theological exploration.

Seward Hiltner’s work on theology of aging is the result of a 1974 retired teachers’ conference in the U.S.A. and discusses, among other topics, the ambivalent attitude towards older people. His concluding comment is apt: “perhaps theology has something to contribute to society about ageing” (Hiltner, 1972 p. 174). The Alban Institute in U.S.A. has published a couple of
books. Dosia Carlson’s 1997 *Engaging in Ministry with Older Adults*, does contain more theological work aimed at self-development; Lois Knutson’s 1999 *Understanding the Senior Adult: A Tool for Wholistic Ministry* contains practical information about aging, together with liturgical material.

There is a variety of devotional material designed for older people. Such includes two recent works, Mary Morrison’s 1998 *Let Evening Come*, and Missy Buchanan’s 2010 *Talking with God in Old Age*. Morrison uses extracts from her journals to describe her own ageing over a forty-year period. She faces the difficulties of old age with peace and balance. The elders have something of value to contribute. God is there: there is a Presence in her writing to which she refers, as she writes “realizing fully that we are all mortal will give back the present, the true moment by the eternal now” (Morrison, 1998 p. 147).

Missy Buchanan is a well-known popular writer, columnist and speaker on aging and faith; her writings include *Living with Purpose in a Worn-out Body*, *Aging Faithfully, Don’t Write My Obituary Yet* and *Talking With God in Old Age*. She has appeared on prime-time television in the United States, most notably *Good Morning America*, addressing these themes. Her ministry she sees as a response to a ‘holy nudge’ which moved her ‘to reach out to older adults, especially those who are struggling to find a purpose and who need a dose of spiritual encouragement’. (from her website, [http://www.missybuchanan.com](http://www.missybuchanan.com) The popularity of her ministry is made clear through the reception of her monthly column on ‘Aging Well’, found in the *United Methodist Reporter* and many other publications. She reflects on the problems and sufferings of old age. Her poetry echoes that of various psalms in which an aged person with limitation talks to God. He is there - He has a purpose, a future.

Now I can face the future with confidence,
Knowing that I have a place with you forever. (Buchanan, 2010 p. 95)
In these writings a theology of ageing is implicit but not examined in detail, yet they exude a lively hope.

The comparison can be made with the doctoral work done by Dagmar Ceramides on the relationship of depression in later life and the Christian faith. Depression is one of the major reasons why elderly people find it hard to exercise hope. Ceramides’ work will be covered in the next chapter of this thesis.

The attention paid in recent gerontological literature to the association of spirituality with the process of growing older is a healthy contribution, as is the influence of religion on the lives of older people. The pressing needs of pastoral care for older people seem to have impelled some theological thought on the subject, while examination and restatement of traditional values may have revived interest in theology and ageing. What is lacking is a formal theological treatment of what it means for people to age. Lyon (1985) lamented that, while there has been an explosion of interest in social and psychological aspects of ageing, there was no framework to allow people to come to grips with their own ageing:

The problem is, rather, that we have few serious frameworks within which that information could find its proper place in response to our deepest questions. The frameworks we do have are often rough-hewn amalgamations of platitudes, moralisms and uncritically appropriated facts and theories (Lyon, 1985 p.21).

A solidly constructed theology of ageing would have much to contribute to society and inform people about ageing. It would also set the contextual experience of ageing in conversation with key elements in the core of systematic agenda.

This research project, then, is an attempt to provide some of this missing component. I am seeking to reach back into the Christian tradition in order to explore how a life of faith has and can assist older people and how its theological commitment to hope may enhance the life of ageing
people. This thesis is not then an exercise in practical theology or pastoral ministry \textit{per se}. \textit{It is a theological inquiry}. It will be explored through the assistance of Juergen Moltmann’s writings.

Now Moltmann has not written specifically about ageing. Moltmann is much better known for his being a theologian of hope. He is often set alongside his contemporary Wolfhart Pannenberg, though they differed on the political implications of their theologies (Grenz & Olson 1992). According to Moltmann, God will change this world: “Similarly, God’s promise is not for another world, but for the new creation of \textit{this} world” (Bauckham, 2005 p. 151).

It is expected that Moltmann’s emphasis on hope will be helpful into this theological enquiry into ageing. The benefit of making use of Moltmann transcends this theological capacity and reputation, however. The matter is personal. Moltmann may not have written overtly on ageing but he is one of the very few theologians still writing in the ninth decade of their lives. Moltmann has been selected because he has entered into old age himself and is still writing about hope, when, no doubt, he is experiencing the growing infirmities and constraints which ageing brings. For the purpose of this thesis, what is of interest is how often he has returned to his formative years.

His autobiography, \textit{A Broad Place}, was published in 2008. The story begins with the reminiscence ‘Seventy-five years ago’ as Moltmann looks back to his earliest days in the ‘shared settlement’, Im Berge. He reflects on his parents ‘who didn’t have a penny in their pockets’ and who aspired to ‘the simple life’ away from ‘grey city walls’ and housing shortage in Hamburg. Moltmann remembers his growing up as an ‘unkempt’ ‘country boy’; there was no church. Moltmann provides an account of his immediate family – his parents, including reference to his father’s horrific injuries sustained in the First World War, and his siblings, including Hartwig, whose brain was so severely damaged by convulsions that he could recognize no one and who
died in Hamburg in 1940. Was that death due to pneumonia, as was said at the time, or was it, as the older Moltmann reflected, due to the beginning of the Nazi euthanasia campaign?

At the age of 83 Moltmann is looking back; he is being personal and more autobiographical than most theologians are. A Broad Place leads through the decades to the present. What is rather striking is the naming of the final section, ‘In the End – the Beginning’. By this stage Moltmann has negotiated his way through his youth, the war, being a prisoner of war. He has graduated beyond his apprenticeship of being a theological student at Göttingen and a pastor at Wasserhorst. He has by this time become a theologian in the church seminary at Wuppertal and begun developing his public theology and a theology of hope. He is able to look back on his interest in political theology and his teaching position at Tübingen and his exposure to Asia. He is able to reflect on his ecumenical and interfaith engagements as well as work on the Trinity and the crucified God. It has also been possible to look at the development of his theology through the lens of the influence of his wife, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. All these things lie behind him. And, then, in a prelude to this final section, there is a chapter entitled ‘New Love for Life’.

Moltmann begins: ‘After I had become 60, I had looked to the future with a kind of happy resignation’. (Moltmann, 2008, p. 334) The children had moved away; he had written the books he had wanted to write. His professional life was ‘drawing to a close’. And then ‘something unexpected happened to me. I became young and lively again.’ Through reflecting on ‘age-old, gnarled, deformed trees, and as if dead’ which began o ‘blossom’ with unexpected exuberance, Moltmann declared to himself: ‘There is life after 60!’ That ‘happy resignation’ gave way to a ‘new love for life’. This ‘new love’ sought to express itself in the face of what Moltmann discerned as an ominous rise in various forms of nihilism – emotional, nuclear and ecological. (Moltmann, 2008; 348) His theological response was to be found in his shift from Christology to
pneumatology and the publication of *The Spirit of Life* and *The Source of Life*. Moltmann wished to express an understanding of the Spirit which turned away from dependence upon inner solitary depths and embraced instead sensory experience and the world. (Moltmann 2008; 348-352) His was a ‘spirituality of the awakened senses’. (Moltmann, 2008: p. 348)

Writing on that last section, ‘In the End – the Beginning’ Moltmann likened this stage of his life’s journey to a ‘festival’. (Moltmann, 2008, 355-363). It was, in one respect, time to take stock and consider how he and others had changed through the years. Turning seventy was an opportunity to consider the findings of a theological biography and consider how his generation had come to do theology, had sought to live it and what might be its legacy for the next generations. (Moltmann, 2008; p.360). It was a time of endings and completions and Moltmann came to a different realization of hope at this later stage in his life: “Earlier, I had often supposed that hope enables a person’s mind and spirit to live in the future, in expectations and projects. Later on, I realised that hope is the living power to find the new beginning in what is at present an end.” (Moltmann, 2008: p. 355)

Moltmann has been selected because he has traversed this journey himself. He has intimate experiences of their relevant context. He has written continually on the theology of hope; he himself was born in 1926 and now is well into his 80s. His most recent book, *Ethics of Hope*, was published in English in 2012. Moltmann recovered hope as a serious theological study in the mid-1960s and has expanded that agenda and has covered a wide range of subjects. There is an expectation for those who suffer distress through the process of ageing may find some encouragement to exercise hope through Moltmann’s writings. Hope consists of the expectation for something combined with a desire for that to be achieved: “expectation and desire [are] combined” (Moore, 2004 p. 673). This definition does include both secular and spiritual components. In the secular sense one may hope for a situation or set of conditions to improve, or
even for survival in life threatening situations. In spiritual terms hope bears some relation to the Transcendent. Whereas Greek thinking applied the idea of hope to an ambiguous, open-ended future (hope 2010), Christian theology provided a definite direction based on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The main thrust of my thesis will be on the spiritual aspect of hope.

I also realize that the term “applying” in the title of this thesis could invoke a variety of nuances. I take this to mean the process by which an ageing person may allow insights gained from Moltmann’s eschatology to shape their outlook and focus on life, thereby finding hope. In this connection a comment on a meditation in Moltmann’s 1992 work *The Spirit of Life* may well be appropriate:

The observer is drawn into the history of Christ. He does not give the history to himself: he applies himself to Christ’s history … he then discovers himself in that history (Moltmann, 1992 p.303).

“Applying”, then, means more than merely being informed about the facts of ageing; nor is it a matter of inspiring one to live by certain ethical ideals. It involves the discovery of one’s self in the very process of growing older. The language of applying involves the art of practice. The use of ‘applying’ could also be seen by comparison with applied theology. Here we have a technical term meaning the use of theology in everyday life.

In order to explore this issue of hope in ageing I am drawing on the theology of Moltmann. He is, of course, himself, an ageing theologian. In the course of his lifetime he has written on the full spectrum of the systematic agenda, as well as many theological issues informed by experience of social and political concerns. Of particular interest and focus in my thesis is his emphasis on hope. His extensive discussions on other topics lie beyond the scope of my present research. In his early works, he wrote, from his own experience, of God’s presence in suffering and the power of hope. His first major work in 1967 *Theology of Hope*, set the tone and direction for his theology. By restructuring Christian doctrines in a promissory direction he has greatly influenced theology
in the latter half of the twentieth century and became one of the most influential contemporary German theologians insofar as most of his writings have been translated into the English language. One can understand his theological method in terms of a transcendental model. While other theologians, notably Carl Braaten, Johannes Metz, and Wolfhart Pannenberg shared this new theological direction, it is not my intention to make critical evaluations of different theologians, but rather to restrict my focus to Moltmann. I am also aware of the influence of Moltmann’s wife, Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel on Moltmann’s theology, especially in the emergence of maternal ideas in patriarchal theology. In the 1980s they began a joint ministry in theology in which they challenged the patriarchal image of the church and followed this in the 1991 publication of *God-His and Hers.*

Moltmann began writing about hope as a much younger theologian, seeking to rebuild a devastated life. Now, in his later life, his route into hope has altered as he has written about new beginnings in the end of life. In his old age, his sense of curiosity, exploration, and even adventure continues (Moltmann, 2000 p.xv).

I am also drawing on Moltmann’s theology because he realizes that theology is not an abstract discipline but is very much involved in the realities of life. “There is no Christian identity without public relevance … it gets involved with the affairs of society” (Moltmann, 1993 p.1). His existential theology also helps people find theological answers out of personal experiences (Moltmann, 2000, p.3). Earlier, in his 1993 work, *The Way of Jesus Christ,* he wrote, “what I wanted was not an eternal Christology for heaven, but a Christology for men and women who are on the way in the conflicts of history” (Moltmann, 1993 p. viii). As we will see, ageing is perhaps the greatest individual crisis that a person can face, reaching to and beyond the limits of one’s finitude.
This thesis is breaking new ground. It is evident Moltmann himself has not written on the theme of ageing. Moltmann’s work is widely cited and used by other theologians. There appears to no previous attempt to apply Moltmann’s understanding of hope to the process of ageing and how life may be informed by his reading of a resurrection hope. In this particular instance Moltmann provides the lens through which an under-examined theological context- that of ageing or senescence- is explored. The integrity of the argument of the context, and the manner in which Moltmann’s thinking is put to use.

The emphasis on this particular issue necessarily means that discussion of ageing must also embrace a consideration of death and whether there can be hope beyond this life. The connection between ageing and death was made by Small. Moltmann provides a way through hope and hope which also involves a consideration of the legacy the ageing would wish to leave behind. There is little explicit theological work done on this intersection of concerns. It may simply be a time for putting into place a framework of ideas which may warrant critique in the future. I am myself writing out of the experience of growing older and am only too well aware of how few of my age, living with a degree of independence in residential care, are engaged in the act of theological exploration.
Chapter 2

In search of hope.

There are a number of ways in which theology could examine the problem of ageing. It could so easily lend itself into an inquiry of a theology of dying, a theology of suffering, of grieving or even a theology of the Cross. These are all legitimate approaches and have been used by many different thinkers. The emphasis on age could also lead to an extended discussion on a theology of the benefits of tradition and memory as well as the wisdom of the elders. This thesis will draw on the writings of Juergen Moltmann and explore ageing through a lens of hope.

Moltmann is arguably the most influential of modern German theologians. He believes that theology is not the sole possession of the church, but is also a subject for public discussion. While he remains a Protestant theologian he absorbs Catholic and Orthodox theologies, and engages with Jewish thinkers. His theology has a Christological basis, a “hope for the future based on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus” (Grenz & Olson 1992 p. 173). He does not construct a formal outline of Christian theology, but is rather flexible, as theology is, for him, a grand adventure. Moltmann, however, encourages the possibility of a theology of hope.

Moltmann’s interest in hope commenced near the beginning of his academic career, promoted more than by political and social conditions than by ageing. In fact, it was the influence of a Jewish Marxist philosopher, Ernst Bloch which led him to construct “a theological parallel to his atheistic principle of hope” (Moltmann, 2008 p.79). This was his first book The Theology of Hope - the primacy of hope in Christian doctrine – was published in 1964; it was subsequently

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8 I have used the dates of the publication of English translations here
republished as an S.C.M. classic in 2011. Its distinguishing features were an examination of eschatology in order “to show how theology can set out from hope and begin to consider its theme in an eschatological light “ (Moltmann, 1964, p.12).

Eschatology was looked upon as the doctrine of the last things in human history and included the Parousia, or the return of Christ, judgement and the general resurrection. Moltmann defined eschatology in terms of hope. This definition stayed with him throughout his career. In 1996 he wrote “ the realistic determination of the cross can only be the restoration of all things”; and, in 2010 he concludes his work by saying, “Out of the victims of human history God builds his coming kingdom” (Moltmann, 2010, p.277).

The book, *Theology of Hope*, was written in the light of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and N.A.T.O. which threatened to engulf the world and destroy civilization. It was different from other theologies of the time in that for Moltmann hope “separates eschatology from the optimism of modern faith in progress” (Moltmann, 2008, p.113). The book received overwhelming success, and worldwide acclaim was achieved with the book being translated into five languages and six editions. In 1995 Moltmann reviewed the history of the book, while acknowledging the authorship, he recognized that the book had its own separate history. Hope extended worldwide and influenced many different countries and cultures. “‘Hope in action’ was translated into many different political and cultural contexts and bore fruit contextually” (Moltmann, 1995, p.10).

From the perspective of this thesis it is evident that Moltmann’s first hope had little to do with the prospect of ageing. He was not yet forty. The temper of his subsequent theological writings had nevertheless been established. Other major themes he dealt with concerned the nature of God, revelation as a promise, an emphasis on the future, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the
resurrection of the body, and, of course, eschatology. Rather than being an attached appendix to the theological corpus, hope is central to all theology. This basic disposition of hope marks all of Moltmann’s extensive theological writings. He wrote in 1967:

From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore revolutionizing and transforming the present. (Moltmann, 1967, p.16).

This emphasis on hope can be seen in the other volumes of his early trilogy. Back in 1972 he explored the wide relevance of the cross of Jesus Christ with publication of *The Crucified God*. Here the language of hope is used to understand and explore the suffering God. In 1977 he wrote of hope for the messianic kingdom in unstable times which the church seeks in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. Moltmann observed: ‘They (the churches) do not stray into social isolation but become a living hope in the midst of the people’ (Moltmann, 1977, p. xv1).

The remaining major volumes of his work, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1981), emphasizing the role of the Persons in the Trinity, *God in Creation* (1993), hope for the Creation, show an interest in hope, as does the 1996 book *The Coming of God* – which looks towards a hope beyond Easter. This emphasis on hope continues in *The Way of Jesus Christ* (1990), a Christology for pilgrim people. In *The Source of Life* in 1997 he reflects for the first time on his experiences as a prisoner of war life and leads on to discuss the life of people led by the Holy Spirit. His *Experiences in Theology* (2000) continues the theme of hope through his exploration of theology, *In the End the Beginning* – a discussion on personal hope in the present chaotic times, the *Sun of Righteousness Arise* written in 2010, and finally *Ethics of Hope*, written in 2012, on a broader scale, where “the hope for the eschatological transformation of the world leads to a transformative ethics” (Moltmann, 2012 p. xiii) and thereby bringing Christian ethics to the forefront. These writings all show the same interest in hope. The later works, together with his autobiography, demonstrate a more reflective aspect of his work.
This thesis is built upon a foundation which Moltmann laid in his first book. That emphasis on hope has remained constant. Nevertheless, his later writings show a further refining of his understanding and a wider reference to the theme. He wrote of this change of direction in 1996 when he noted that “My present concern is the doctrine of hope in a special sense i.e the horizons of expectation for political and historical life” (Moltmann, 1996, p xiii). In his 2004 work *In the End - The Beginning* he branches out to discuss the dead.

Together with Wolfhart Pannenberg, Johann Metz and Carl Braaten, Moltmann became known as one of the theologians of hope. They challenged the tenets of protest atheism. Moltmann claims that there is a hope for the future where God’s glory will be found in the liberation of all His creation. And this hope is based on the cross and resurrection of Jesus: ‘every part of his theology is permeated by this central motif’ (Grenz & Olson, 1992 p. 174). By way of contrast, Pannenberg focused on the rationality of the Christian faith. For him ‘The public testing of ideas a rational delineation of the Christian faith, more than personal piety, is the chief weapon of the Church’ (Grenz & Olson p.198). For him the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the climax of God’s revelation - “That the end of history as the final self-revelation of God is proleptically realized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ”. (Schwoebel, 2002, pp. 120 – 121).

Moltmann brings to this discussion on hope a level of considerable authority. What we hear in Moltmann’s story is an example of what Rebecca Chopp calls a poetic witness. This emphasis on a poetic of testimony has become more prominent in Moltmann’s later writings. As he has grown older he has looked back in an autobiographical manner on how he came to the

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10 That which based any hope for the future on purely humanistic terms, providing no room for God. (Grenz & Olson 1992, p.170).
Christian faith and what events have shaped his subsequent theology. Here he is demonstrating the benefits of being an ageing theologian. Such reminiscences are to be found in his 1996 book *The Coming of God*, the 1997 *Source of Life*, the 2004 *In the End, The Beginning* and, of course, his autobiography. The recognition of his own poetic witness is consistent with Richard Rohr’s discernment on the two stages of life. This practice should be seen in the light of how he viewed the role of experience in his writing on *The Spirit of Life*. Moltmann found this hope not only through his academic explorations but, more importantly, through his life’s experiences. Moltmann argues that there are those primary experiences, which help us to understand reality, together with companion experiences. These are things which happen to us, which, in a sense, are forced upon us and shape our nature and outlook:

They mould us, and become our companions. They are events in the past which never become “past” but are continually present in us. We repress them, we work on them, we puzzle over them and interpret them, for we have to live with them. (Moltmann, 1992, pp. 20-21.)

Moltmann has written more about these companion experiences in terms of his spiritual and theological autobiography. They are part and parcel of his practices of interest. They are subjective and yet they relate to significant world events. Their role in his life – and how his theology has been shaped – seems to have become more sharply formed and self-conscious as he has aged. Moltmann is directing the role of these companion experiences through the lens of someone who is older and looking back. To use the words of Richard Rohr: “Basically the first half of life is writing the text, and the second half the commentary on that text” (Rohr, 2011 p 143). As we have seen, the basic text of Moltmann’s life comprised his early theological works, while in the latter part, his writings are seen though the lens of an older man.

After exploring Trinitarian theology, Moltmann began to write about the experience of the affirmed and loved life in his 1992 work *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Behind the writing of this work lay catastrophes, in this case that of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986
and the Gulf war of 1991. “We have been experiencing the forces which deny life, but we also experience the energies that affirm it” (Moltmann, 1992, p. xiii). It is significant that from this time onward, his sixty-fourth year, Moltmann reflects on his own life’s experiences. He frequently comes back to these events in all of his later works.

Moltmann’s own companion experiences refer back to a time of despair, to that first question asked after surviving the firebombing of Hamburg at the age of seventeen: “God, where are you?” (Moltmann, 2004, p.34). The second question arising out of that companion experience, which has haunted him for his whole life is, “Why am I still alive and not dead like the rest?” (Moltmann, 2004, p.34). As a prisoner of war, Moltmann experienced defeat, coupled with the shame arising from the ruin caused by his people. When, in September 1945, the prisoners were shown photographs of Belsen and Buchenwald concentration camps, he was horrified by the sight of these dead bodies. Some of the prisoners decided not to return to their homeland, preferring to stay in Britain. These were the experiences of death.

The other companion experiences relate to love. Through the gift of a Bible, and particularly through reading Psalm 29 (in German\textsuperscript{12}), Moltmann learnt of the love of Christ, who “was assailed by God and suffered from God” (Moltmann 2004., p.35). At the same time, he experienced kindness from Scottish civilians, former enemies, who showed no sign of resentment, rather forgiveness. Later, he attended – still as a prisoner of war – an international S.C.M. conference where he found forgiveness and reconciliation, most notably from some Dutch students who had suffered during the war.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{12} The German text has connotations which the English text does not have. (Moltmann, 2008.p.30)}
Through these events he came to a personal experience of Jesus Christ, the One who is “the brother in suffering and the companion on the road to the land of freedom” (Moltmann, 2008, p.30). From these experiences Moltmann found hope. These experiences from his younger years generate a number of theological comments found in his work. There is a tendency in Moltmann’s theology to put a high regard for themes like “life” as well as “spirit”: he often demonstrates an overriding concern for the inclusion of Jewish experience. Throughout his writings there is a concern for the public sphere. The study of theology is not an apologetic defence of Christianity, but, as Richard Bauckham comments:

Theology is always public theology … addressing not only the church but also the world beyond the church and carried in a pluralistic context for and dialogue about the world (Bauckham in Ford, 2012, p.150).

Moltmann can look back on his life, now that he is well into his mid-80s. From this viewpoint of age he reflects on the trajectories of a life lived through the trials and traumas of two different centuries. In his eighty-fourth year, he reflects on the era of optimism in the nineteenth century and the current age which faces the possibility of complete and total destruction. Moltmann well understands from his experiences and observations of life that recent history has seen two devastating world wars, various killing fields and atrocities as well as climate change. To this dismal list one could add the current (2007-2010) world financial crisis, terrorism, “the deadly dangers of increasing nihilism” (Moltmann, 2008, p. 347) held by those who love death, rather than enjoying the vitality of life. He writes of the many forms which this modern nihilism takes within a culture “which gives up the future of life for lost” (Moltmann, 2008, p. 348).

Other thinkers hold similar views as they, also, observe current Western culture. Christiaan Mostert (2004) writes of the disillusionment and pre-occupation with daily life and entertainment. Mostert reckons that within present Western society secular hopes have collapsed, and that there exists a persuasive element of despair, and inability to see anything beyond the immediate,
through diversions, distractions, and emphasis on entertainment in which commitment is negotiated. He also refers to the collapse of the myth of progress, the failure of science and technology to provide adequate sustenance for the majority of the world’s population as well as the horrors of history. He succinctly notes, “If we want to speak about hope we do so in a climate of disillusionment, if not outright despair” (Mostert in Mostert, 2004, p.49). In a similar way, Dorothy Lee notes that ‘an unconscious hedonism thrives in a materialistic society and is viewed almost as a basic human right” (Lee in Mostert, 2004 p. 211). She notes that in Western society depression and mental illness abound. Further, Hans Schwarz (2000) refers to the preoccupation with the present as people prefer to enjoy their modern amenities, and relish in their pleonexia, while much of the world exists in abject poverty. From a scientific perspective, John Polkinghorne (2002) discusses the possible collapse of the whole universe. From the viewpoint of popular culture, Scott Bader-Saye (2007) argues that there is much in American society which reflects fear. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks “the theme of fear has emerged in a variety of ways in popular culture” (Bader-Saye, 2007, p. 11). This fear takes a variety of forms in popular culture such as fears of terrorism, paedophiles, school shootings, new addictions “and a host of new medical and psychological conditions” (Bader-Saye, 2007, p.10). He goes on to comment that these fears have no bearing on the actual causes of death.

This societal fear and dismal outlook has its effect on individual people who, not only suffer a lack of hope, but see no future for themselves or their children. There is a corresponding sickness and ill-health. Depression has also emerged as a major health problem for the modern world, affecting a significant proportion of the world’s population with a debilitating disease. “Depression alone produces a level of disability equivalent to any other chronic disease” (Clarke, 2009 page number). David Clarke also emphasizes the cost of depression on health resources saying “depression also increases the consumption of health care resources: depression was
associated with a 17% - 46% increase in health care costs in the large WHOLIDO study” (Clarke, 2009, page number). Here, in Australia, the Beyond Blue national depression initiative claims that in 2009 one million Australians suffer with depression, which is roughly 5% of the general population. The Beyond Blue organization describes the well known symptoms of depression in areas of behavior, thoughts, feelings coupled with physical symptoms. I will make the point that depression induces feelings and thoughts of failure, worthlessness, misery, sadness, and general hopelessness. Beyond Blue also make the point that depression often goes unrecognized and untreated. I feel that it is a disease which indicates a level of present societal despair. Depression can obscure the possibility of any hope.

At this point in my discussion I will refer to a doctoral thesis submitted by Dagmar Ceramides in 2008. Coming from the perspective of a therapist working with depression among some elderly people, she “hypothesized that an aspect of relationship with God might contribute to the impact of faith during depressive episodes” (Ceramides, 2008, p.11). She worked with a limited group of twenty participants and fairly rigid selection criteria - the participants were to be Christian, over 65, able to talk fluently in English and affected with loneliness and depression (Ceramides, 2008, p. 73). Her study found that those who had a personal and intimate relationship with God fared better than those who regarded God as more of an acquaintance.

Yet that level and presence of societal despair need not necessarily prevent people from exercising hope. In the darkest period of his life, Moltmann found living hope through a personal experience of God. The present societal situation presents a challenge to hope (Mostert, 2004, pp. xi-xii). People can either live in hope by accepting what God has promised, or decline to exercise hope through unbelief. There is a very real sense in which fear and despair are the opposites of hope. Moltmann’s writing on sin implies this. Despair, then, is an attitude to life which rejects the divine purpose for humanity. There is a very real sense in which:
It is usually said that sin in its original form is man’s wanting to be as God. But that is only one side of sin. Among the sinners whose future is eternal death in Rev.21.8 the “fearful” are mentioned before unbelievers, murderers, and the rest … Temptation then consists not so much in the titanic desire to be as God, but in weakness, timidity, weariness, not wanting to be what God requires of us


To live in hope requires courage to accept in faith God’s purposes for humanity. We can learn to hope through exercising faith. As we shall see, this sort of hope involves itself with the harsh realities of the present life. Despair, depression, and fear are symptoms of a disordered society which desperately needs a new expression of hope.

The theological discussion of hope and ageing takes place against the background of fear and a lack of hope in society in general. The more specific focus of this thesis should now fall on the experiences of growing older, which has both a positive and a negative context. There remains the prospect of physical and cognitive decline. Lyon (1985) noted this ambiguity of ageing:

Old age continues to be seen, at best, an ambiguous achievement. Whatever glorious attributes have been ascribed to old age, its underside of loss, physical decline, and nearness to death has never been far from sight (Lyon, 1985 p.19).

This is that negative side to ageing which can cause some older people to lose hope.

One of the finest expressions of what this experience might be is Matthew Arnold’s poem “Growing Older,” written in the nineteenth century; it depicts ageing in terms of loss, decay, pain, and regret.

What it to grow old?
Is it to lose the glory of the form,
The lustre of the eye?
Is it for beauty to forgo her wreath?
Is it to feel our strength-
Not our bloom only, but our strength decay?
Is it to feel each limb
Grow stiffer, every function lest exact,
Each nerve more loosely strung?
Yes, this and more, but not
Ah,’ tis not what in youth we dream’d ‘twould be!
‘Tis not to have our life
Mellow’d and soften’d was with sunset-glow,
A golden day’s decline.

‘Tis not to see the world
As from a height, with rapt prophetic eyes,
And heart profoundly stirr’d;
And weep, and feel the fullness of the past,
The years that are no more.

Is it to spend long days,
And not once feel we were ever young
It is to add, immured
In the hot prison of the present, month
To month with weary pain.

It is to suffer this,
And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel.
Deep in our hidden heart
Festers the dull remembrance of a change,
But no emotion - none

It is - last stage of all –
When we are frozen up within, and quite
The phantom of ourselves
To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost
Which blame the living man.


Here Matthew Arnold, the greatest Victorian poet of England, presents a dismal view of old age, of frailty, finality, and absence of hope in spite of a Christian faith. To be fair people, living in the nineteenth century knew little, if anything which could relieve pains of old age. They had no societal care for the aged other than the poorhouse or asylum. On the other hand, elders who had wealth could afford domestic servants to care for them. His portrayal of old age contains no hope, no future, nothing.
Ageing does bring a measure of physical and cognitive deterioration, as Hill remarks, “age-related decline has and always will be a part of growing old” (Hill, 2005 p. ix). Together with this deterioration come losses of friends, relatives, and spouses, involving a degree of social isolation and increasing dependence on others. Experience and anecdotal observation would suggest that ageing might involve endless medications, treatments and hospitalization, with no prospect of improvement, rather a continual decline. AIHW notes that, although life expectancy has increased over the years, many of the extra years gained are spent with disability or some serious heath problem (AIHW, 2007 p. 58). This extended life may involve existence, but not necessarily quality of life. There are ethical, moral, legal, and financial problems associated with medical efforts designed simply to prolong life.

Ageing does have a positive component in that this time in one’s life need not necessarily be a period of regression and loss. While some of the points which I will make can apply to Western culture, I will draw heavily on Australian data as provided by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Robert Gingold (1992) notes the contributions of outstanding leaders in world history, such as Winston Churchill - becoming Prime Minister of Great Britain during the war years at the age of 66 - Nelson Mandela remarrying at 80 (for the third time) and Sir Mark Oliphant, becoming Governor of South Australia at the age of 70 (Gingold, 1992 p.ix). To this list I would add Moltmann, who has just published his latest work in his 86th year, and is still lecturing. Gingold also discounts many of those myths which regard ageing as a time of decrepitude. Gayle Savige, Mark Walqvist, Daniel Lee, and Brett Snelson (2001) argue that exercise, fitness, and nutritious food can contribute to healthy ageing. Robert Hill (2005) suggests that older people can adopt lifestyle changes which can help them function well into old age. Beyond all efforts to extend life lies the spectre of human mortality. The maximum human life span seems to be 120 years (Savige et al., 2001 p.1).
Clinical depression is a major issue facing older people. Hill (2005) feels that 5-10% of the general population suffers from this psychological trauma and indicates that the occurrence of depression is higher in the older population. As we have seen, Clarke (2009) also refers to the extent of low mood, with extremely negative, sad, and unhappy feelings about life in general. Depression is a prolonged state of sadness, which some claim arises as a reaction to loss or handicap. Harold Koenig (1994) found that illnesses generated a sense of loss, particularly when a patient was unable to regain previous standard of health.

Klerman (1983) makes the point that our store of knowledge about depression among the elderly is continually growing and has generated much interest among professional therapists. However, he also claims that there are problems in defining depression among differing professional disciplines. Klerman also notes that diagnosis of depression is difficult, as the elderly patient does not generally complain to their doctor about being sad, rather focusing on “memory concentration disturbances, apathy, lack of drive or somatic problems” (Klerman, 1985 p.7.) In this scenario depression and senile dementia have some similar symptoms. Furthermore, depression is often associated with medical illness, and, as Gingold (2002) also mentions, drugs used to treat other conditions can invoke depression. Klerman notes that the distinction between sad moods and clinical depression is not very clear. Klerman states that treatment of depression presents some difficulties, especially through the use of antidepressant medications. Skodol and Spitza (1983) claim that depression may arise among some within a community decades after some major national or environmental disaster (such as those post World War 2 veterans), and that those who have lost fathers before the age of ten may experience depression decades later.

\[13\] Citing U.S.A.statistics
\[14\] Walqvist cities the symptoms of clinical depression as: loneliness and despair, loss of interest in life, distorted sleep patterns, anxiety, difficulty in concentration, tiredness, lack of energy, loss of appetite, neglect of personal appearance and loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities. (Walqvist et.al, 2001 p.115-116)
Gary Kennedy (1996) also found that the level of depression among older people living in the community was not so great, whereas there was a higher level in depression among medical outpatients and an even higher level among residents of nursing homes. Finally, the caregiver of elderly family members or spouses also had high levels of depression. Nevertheless, he feels that depression is a treatable illness, commenting:

The notion that suicide and depression are often reasonable responses to loss and disability in old age, rather than a manifestation of treatable mental illness does not represent informed social policy – it reinforces the older adult’s wish to avoid being labeled as mentally ill (Kennedy, 1996 p xiii).

Yet the tragedy is that depression remains untreated: Gary Kennedy, Helen Metz, and Robert Lowinger (1996) cite a number of recent studies which would indicate that the majority of depressive episodes in older adults go untreated (Kennedy, 1996 p.14-15). Gingold (1992) makes the point that depression can lead to further health problems and threats to successful living.

Some older people feel so overwhelmed by intense feelings of despair that they try to end their present agony through suicide. On this point Koenig (1994) comments:

There comes a time and set of circumstances for some individuals when the pain associated with living becomes so great that it exceeds the fear of dying and impels them to pursue their own death with undeterred resolution. The decision to embark on the latter course invariably occurs in a setting of enormous emotions or unbearable fear’ (Koenig, 1994,p.463).

While the actual rates of suicide are not so great – AIHW claim that suicide accounts for only 1.6% of all deaths in Australia, Koenig has similar data for the U.S.A., – and there are many more attempts at suicide. But Kennedy (1996) claims that in the U.S.A., while elders comprise 12% of the nation’s population, that group accounts for 13% of suicides. In Australia in 2005 13% of all suicides were committed by older people. More men than women commit successful
suicides. The costs related to suicide are great. AIHW claim that the “human and economic costs are substantial” (AIHW, 2007 p. 80).

Back in 1975, Marv Miller argued that there existed a high level of unreported suicides among older people – he estimated that in 1975 the actual suicide rate was 61% higher than the actual suicides reported. The reasons for this discrepancy are diverse, ranging from family protection to collection of insurance benefits: “It seems that the underreporting of suicidal deaths occurs more often among the elderly because the certification of an older person’s death would not normally arouse much curiosity” (Miller, 1975 p. 2). Koenig also reports on those who refuse life-saving surgery or for some reason neglect their medical care, whose intentional deaths are “falsely recorded as due to natural causes” (Koenig, 1994 p. 466).

The causes of suicide are complex, but include depression, alcoholism, chronic pain, bereavement, and social isolation. Koenig (1994) adds mental illness. Schneider (1996) comments: Life stress is clearly dependent on the relationship between the individual and the environment. When stress becomes overwhelming, it is because the individual appraises his or her life problems as being unmanageable or as exceeding available resources (Schneider, 1996p.9. It is at the point that these problems become unmanageable that suicide is seen as a credible alternative.

The experience of ageing is ambiguous. On the one hand there is Stagg’s account of the biblical writers which holds out the prospect of veneration, wisdom and dignity. The contrast can be made with Arnold’s poem and Ceramides’s theory of depression. The process of ageing is full of new present experiences which may be adverse and become companion experiences. Moltmann formed experiences while still a young man. Nevertheless there is a resonance. The experience of ageing provides a context in which theology must address what might be good news. It is on that basis we proceed upon an appropriate recognition and confirming of hope.
Chapter 3

Understanding Hope in an Ageing Population.

We have recognized how many people today are facing the frailties of ageing in a world which frequently lacks societal hope. This is a culture of despair which a number of theological writers\(^\text{15}\) feel threatens the very survival of life. That prevailing atmosphere is punctuated with critical intimations of hope. Juergen Moltmann found hope at a time of deep despair in his life, but he claims that people are not born with hope. Nor do they necessarily gain hope from their experiences but they can decide, so he argues, to learn from hope. And so, at the age of sixty nine, Moltmann asked the pivotal question “Can we learn to hope?” (Moltmann, 1997, p. 39). It is his conviction that people can indeed learn to hope, by saying yes to life and to the future. It is a way of living life which requires education and discerning, but not in the sense of curriculum requirements. This kind of hope requires experience and a commitment of will. While Moltmann found hope through his experience of God in the context of Christian theology, we need to recognize that there are other possibilities through which ageing people might gain hope, some of which have religious correlates. All have some degree of legitimacy which we will now proceed to consider;

There is, of course, a distinction to be made here and which has already been anticipated. Moltmann is writing about a theology of hope but the word itself is not exclusively a Christian

\(^{15}\)Such as Chris Mostert, in *Hope, Challenging the Colure of Despair* (Mostert 2004), argues that the only alternative to living in hope is nihilism, Hans Schwarz *Eschatology* (Schwarz 2000), refers to a colder more solitary world and John Polkinghorne in *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (Polkinghorne (2000) considers that the universe is very fragile.
category. It also has a more public and common reference. It embraces both a secular and spiritual value. The word hope permeates all of society and carries with it a secular connection, as it looks toward the future. The anatomy of hope can include associated virtues, like trust, belief, confidence, together with a capacity to overcome obstacles and handicaps. The spirit of hope can sometimes be hidden away in a language of “in spite of” or “nevertheless” and can express “a confidence in a future event” (Macquarie Dictionary, 1981 p.353). Jerome Groopman notes that “Hope is one of our central emotions, but we often confuse it with optimism” (Groopman, 2004, px1.). Hope, he argues, is a much stronger emotion. False hope is a reliance on something which is simply untrue. The word is often used as a contrast with suffering, despair, depression, and hopelessness. In this thesis we will be exploring the breadth of the term “hope” and ultimately contrast it with Moltmann’s wide use of the concept.

In various forms people have tried to create hope by changing present structures without any reference to a deity or to God. This is what I myself refer to in this thesis as generic hopes rather than the technical term “Utopia”. There seems to be, within the human psyche, a deep seated dissatisfaction with society and a longing for something better. Ruth Levitas states that “The construction of an imaginary world free from the difficulties that occur takes place in one form or another in many cultures” (Levitas, 1990 p.1). Such a hope has a history. It can look back to Plato, (c 486 B.C.) who described an ideal city state based on justice and fairness to all, and to Plutarch who, in the 1st century B.C, portrayed an idealized description of life in ancient Sparta. He speaks of Lycurgus, the legendary founder of Sparta, who traveled to Crete and brought back to Sparta the principal of communal ownership of all property. The underlying hope here was for a better society where all people could be treated alike.

The term ‘Utopia’ itself was coined by Sir Thomas More in 1516. Here he described “an ideal and communal city state in which the institutions and policies were governed by reason”
(Utopia 2011), thereby mitigating evil. With the discovery of the New World in the 15th and 16th centuries there was an explosion of Utopian thought by Europeans weary of centuries of debilitating wars and longing for a new world. Many philosophers and thinkers subsequently worked, positing ideas for that perfect society (Manuel and Manuel, 1980). Various Utopian communities were established, mainly in the American colonies under the influence of these ideals. Most failed, though some, such as the Hutterites, have continued to survive.

Karl Marx worked to create an economic utopia where the means of production were owned by the proletariat rather than the wealthy minority. Marxist philosophers built on his ideals and were sure that, in that perfect society, the evils generated by eighteenth century capitalism would be abolished. Ernst Bloch, for example, argued that humankind would progress (Bloch, 1970, p. 143-144) as humanity emerged outwards to search for food the human evolutionary process became more creative as people made tools, used fire, fashioned raw materials and began to think. This “reflective labor took humankind to a superior position historically and allowed it to seek and find what was wanted: need is the mother of all thought” (Bloch, 1970 p 3). As the human being continues to walk the journey of life, “he recognizes the right and wrong ways”. (Bloch, 1970 p.42). Bloch felt that while people’s night dreams centered on repressed experiences, daydreams were different. They contained images of that which is not yet but can be created fantasized. He found value in daydreaming of those “castles in the air” with little attention to building costs (Bloch 1970 p.87), and imagining what a new world could possibly be.

There is some value in dreaming of what could be possible. The history of Australia has examples of fulfilled dreams. The most recent of these are the linkage of two parts of Sydney with a harbour bridge, the supply of water to the desert town of Kalgoorlie and the Snowy River Hydro-
Electric scheme. Such dreams do not lead to a perfect society;\textsuperscript{16} as soon as one problem is remedied others appear.\textsuperscript{17}

Sometimes the generic hope can appear in a religious form. Schwarz discerned a utopian religious hope in the counter-culture influenced by Hindu philosophy and involving eastern mysticism. It was effectively inspired by Fritjof Capra who saw a close affinity with Eastern mysticism, in which “laws are embedded in nature but are not decreed by a divine lawgiver” (Schwarz, 2000 p.229). He envisaged a hope for a new world with new beginnings and undergoing a resurrection. In a similar vein Marylin Fergusson believes that a new age is dawning where we move towards the future; the human eye only needs to discover itself, heaven can be experienced on earth. The next world will be very much like the world we are accustomed to though much more beautiful (Schwarz, 2000).

Against this Schwarz comments:

The dream of a good life may never become reality….Actual hope does not come from us or from the world we live in. At the most we can somewhat improve it. If there is hope, it must come from beyond, from outside ourselves and our environment, from the one who created and sustains us (Schwarz, 2000 p.243).

Moltmann also believes that the Christian looks forward to a better world: however this is God’s work, not that of human effort. Writing in 1967 Moltmann agreed:

The Christian hope … will destroy the presumption in these hopes of better human freedom of successful life, of justice and dignity for our fellow men, of control of the possibilities of nature, because it does not find in these movements the salvation it awaits, because it refuses to let the entertaining and realizing of utopian ideals of this kind reconcile it with existence. It will thus outstrip these visions of a better, more peaceable world …nothing can be “very good” until “all things” are become new (Moltmann, 1967, p.34).

\textsuperscript{16} Today congestion is a major problem on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.
\textsuperscript{17} In the 1930’s people dreamed of having adequate food on Australia. Today we have the opposite problem of obesity as a result of too much food.
However, the Christian does not, and cannot, settle with the mere acceptance of societal evils. As Moltmann says, “in practical opposition to things as they are, and in creative reshaping of them. Christian hope must protest against that which destroys life and calls their very existence into question” (Moltmann 1967, p.350). Moltmann feels that concrete action is needed to rectify social evils.

The history of the nineteenth century in England demonstrated that the greatest social reforms of that era were indeed initiated by Christians. John Roach has concluded that “The sheer total weight of the religious influence was very great” (Roach, 1978 p.51). The result of their efforts was a vast improvement in living and working conditions. An example of this is the work of Samuel Plimsoll who agitated for a mark on cargo ships to prevent dangerous loading. Yet they did not bring about God’s kingdom. British sociologists coined the term “ameliorism,” which refers to attempts to improve society by reforming individuals rather than structures. At best, any effort at societal reform must remain provisional as Pannenberg (2002) writes:

Thus only the kingdom of God himself will establish genuine justice and consequently permanent peace. By comparison, all human efforts in the service of justice and peace remain provisional. (Pannenberg, 2002 p.6).

There is a further dimension through which hope could be explored. While some people have sought to improve their future by changing the structures of society, others have looked at the inner person and considered spirituality. I will now discuss spirituality in ageing people, as this topic appears in much of the literature relating to gerontology.18 While there seems to be recognition that there is an aspect of the human nature which is more than material, that people do have a spiritual nature, it is notoriously difficult to define precisely. This term is used in a way which contrasts with the more restrictive observance of organized religious practice. Gary Bouma

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18 Such as Harold Koenig, Melvin Kimble, David Moberg, Elizabeth MacKinlay, Albert Jewell and Robert Atchley.
(2006) claims that there has been an increased interest in spirituality and religion, particularly after September 2001.

Elisabeth MacKinlay discusses the meanings which lie behind the term spirituality. She believes that the definition of spirituality should be wide enough to include all groups, whether religious or secular. Her preferred definition, used in her 1998 work, is:

That which lies at the core of each person’s being, an essential dimension which brings meaning to life. It is acknowledged that spirituality is not constituted only by religious practices, but must be understood more broadly, as relationship with God, however God or ultimate meaning is perceived by the person and in relationship with other people. (MacKinlay, 2001 p.52).19

She argues that attention to the spiritual part of a human being has an appropriate place in aged care programmes. Robert Atchley uses spirituality to refer to “an inner, experiential region of human life” (Atchley, 1989 p.13). For him the concept covers a wide variety of expression and settings such as the various religious traditions, relationship to others and an appreciation of nature. In the biblical sense both MacKinlay and Moltmann link human spirituality to that breath of life imparted by God (Genesis 2.7). Atchley has summarized his material to form some mosaic from which others might use his work.

This area of thinking has developed since the 1960s, and at present, is very popular. It is a more elevated word than religion; its devotees walk the way of perfection, untroubled by the entanglements of earthly life. David Tacey (Tacey 2008) states that there has been, in recent years, a marked interest in the subject of spirituality. Focusing on this kind of spirituality rather than the religious kind can appeal to those who have wide philosophical convictions. It can nevertheless appear rather vague and amorphic offering nothing of substance on which an ageing person can find hope. Yet through exploring spirituality an ageing person may be helped to find something

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19 She uses the same definition in her 2001 work (MacKinlay 2001) as she used in her 1998 work p.36).
which is more substantial. On the other hand, David Moberg finds a genuine spirituality in the biblical writings which stand in marked contrast to the formalized religion of the time. He writes:

    The Hebrew prophets, Jesus and the New Testament apostles often called for a genuine spiritual, God honoring faith that stood in stark contrast the hypocritical repetition of traditional religious practices (Moberg, 2001) p.7).

This sort of biblical spirituality can provide a real basis for finding hope, as Robert Atchley’s summary indicates. This dissertation is nevertheless more explicitly theological. The concept of spirituality can be vague and elusive. However, the intention here is to consider how one may find hope through the Christian tradition by applying Moltmann’s writings.

    Sometimes hope takes the form of a protest against mortality. We live in a world where there is a latent expectation that things will get better. There is an assumption that human lives can be improved and even extended. There is a belief that medical science can cure any disease, if not now, then in the not too far distant future. There is an element of truth in this expectation.

    For example, studies have shown that lifestyle factors such as exercise, a healthy diet, and a lower level of stress have reduced the occurrence of Alzheimer’s disease, which destroys the brain. A study conducted in the University of Maryland School of Public Health suggested that a certain type of planned exercise could improve the ability of people affected by Alzheimer’s disease to function at a better level (Whiteman, 2013). Similarly, deep brain stimulation has improved the ability of people with Parkinson’s disease to function (Silberstein et.al., 2009). Through these interventions mortality can be postponed.

    Life extension theories have appealed to the popular market and have generated a huge industry involving sale of dietary and nutritional products. This area of thinking has emerged since the 1970s under the impetus of the Life Extension Foundation and involved theories and experiments with some scientific basis. I would make a distinction at this point. There are a variety of other texts which give excellent advice for caring for one’s health in later life. James Fries,
Donald Vickery, Richard Telford, and Rob Reid, in their 1993 manual *Take Care of Yourself*, present nine lifestyle habits which can be modified, state: “The additional months and years replace those that otherwise might have brought dependence and depression” (Fries et al., 1993 p. 76). These same authors claim that, while it is possible with healthy lifestyle to increase life expectancy, it is not possible to increase life span (Fries et al., 1993 p.69). Similar thoughts were presented by Peter Baranowski in 1989 (at the age of 75)

> I do not promise to stop the onset of ageing. That is as impossible as stopping the rotation of the earth, but I believe it is within our power to slow down this process and make life more pleasurable for us (Baranowski, 1989 p.97).

Such thinking is more reputable concerning those ideas concerning the renewal of youth. There were in the Middle Ages myths concerning a magical fountain which, if water from such a fountain were drunk, youth could be renewed (Fountain of youth, 2011). Ancient Celtic thought concerned a land of youth, inhabited by those who remained young (Tir na’Og, 1988). Another myth concerned a magical elixir, or potent, which could prolong life (elixir, 2010).

Linus Pauling (1986), referring to the American scene, feels that an appropriate collation of nutrition, food and vitamins can actually extend life:

> My estimate … is that through the optimum use of vitamins and other supplements the length of the period of well-being and length of life could be increased by twenty five to thirty five years (Pauling, 1986 p.221).

In referring to life extension, I am not referring to the benefits of a healthy lifestyle but rather to those attempts designed to extend life beyond the limits of tissue degeneration. Some involved in this type of research “believe that future breakthrough in tissue rejuvenation will eventually enable humans to have indefinite lifespan through complete rejuvenation to a healthy, youthful condition” (life expectancy, 2011). Vidican (2011) describes experimental work at Harvard University where scientists successfully reversed the ageing process in mice. This sort of experiment has led one scholar who thinks that it is possible to reverse ageing. Aubrey de Gray is one scholar who thinks
that it is possible to reverse ageing (De Grey 2007). This new movement is accompanied by a huge global industry which has been involved with considerable legal and regulatory problems.

The form of hope here is an effort to extend the present life and gain a sliver of immortality. However, none of these efforts can provide a real lasting hope of re-gaining the eternal life which was lost in Eden. Facing all human beings lays the spectre of their ultimate mortality: all of these attempts to extend human life ignore statements of Scripture which reckons that all people ultimately will die, - such as Hebrews 9.27: “And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once and after that the judgement.” Life extension is one of those arrogant human fantasies which offers no real hope for ageing people. Moltmann does discuss the neurobiological thesis in his 2010 work *Sun of Righteousness Arise*, (p.217) but only in terms of human embryos and natural selection of the human species not extension of life.

This thesis will now explore how Moltmann’s theology of hope may inform the process of ageing. His theology not only serves as a foil to generic hopes but can also stand over and against various ideas of a celestial heaven. The belief in some sort of heaven or another world is not peculiar to the Christian faith. Such a place can possess a physical aspect, that place where the sun, moon, and stars move about or symbolically, that place where God and other deities live (Heaven, 2010). It is also that place where invisible conflicts and actions occur (Simon 1958). Various metaphors have been used in Christian worship and funerary inscriptions to depict heaven: they can include reunion with loved ones, the heavenly city, that New Jerusalem, the place of prayer and sacrifice, a place where people can see God and have fellowship with the risen Christ, a place where there is an endless banquet of the best, a place of rest and finality (Simon 1958). Heaven has also been the subject of endless speculations. Nicolas Wright (1999) sums up the classic Christian view of heaven in these words:

> Christians regularly speak of their hope in terms of “going to heaven when they die” one hears in hymns, one finds it in prayers – (not least in my tradition) in liturgical
prayers, but when people pray extempore … the point seems to be that there is something called “eternity”, which is regularly spoken of as though it has only the loosest connections with space and time, and one day we are going to step into this eternal existence, whether in the form of heaven or hell, which has almost nothing to do with this earth and this present history (Wright, 1999 p.5).

In his later 2007 20 work, Wright refers to recent communal grieving in the United Kingdom following the death of Princess Diana, and claims that many Christians are totally confused about eternal issues. He cites a number of reasons for this confusion. Firstly, the old dogma of a celestial heaven has been attacked; secondly there has been a revival of the old idea of purgatory in the form of a post-mortem journey. Thirdly, he feels that some hymns used in funeral services are “closer to Tennyson and Shelley than to orthodox Christianity” (Wright, 2007 p.149). Fourthly, that some of the newer rites (again referring to the U.K Anglican situation) marginalize the Christian concept of the resurrection of the body, and finally the use of cremation can be seen as an adaptation to Hindu or Buddhist culture. Wright discerns that there is within society a vague optimism, that, in the face of death, things will be all right. He also argues that our present idea of heaven owes more to a Platonic background than the biblical one saying that “Most western Christians...have supposed that Christianity was committed to a soft version of Plato’s position” (Wright, 2007 p 102).

There are a number of ways of entering this thinking. From and empirical point of view there are narratives relating to after-life experiences. Maurice Rawlings, (1973), a cardiologist, recorded and summarized after-life experiences recounted to him by patients who had survived clinical death. Judy Harris, a nurse with a lifetime of experience in hospice work, recorded in 2008 accounts of forty-three people who had some sort of encounter with transcendence before death. This medical data could indicate the presence of something beyond this life. There are also a variety of books on the popular market describing experiences of those who have seen, or been, in

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20 His 1999 work was written when he was the Dean of Lichfield under the name of N.T. Wright but his 2007 work was written when he was the Bishop of Durham under the name of Tom Wright. However the copyright of this work is Nicolas Thomas Wright.
heaven. One of these is the story of Don Piper, a Southern Baptist pastor in America, who was clinically dead for ninety minutes following a motor vehicle accident. He claims to have been to the gates of heaven and meeting people whom he knew and had died (Piper 2004).

Popular imagination still retains a concept of heaven; some modern obituaries and death notices present the hereafter in heaven as a continuation of the good things of life, an eternal round of golf or eternal fishing. Andrew Tillett, reporting on the death of a young fashion designer in a motor vehicle accident, wrote a newspaper headline “She’ll be sipping Moet\(^21\) in heaven” (Tillett 2008 p.1). Others hope for a reunion with loved ones in a Celestial Heaven.

From a more religious perspective there is a range of options: immortality and transmigration of the soul, resurrection of the body and reincarnation. For a theology of hope that looks beyond a life here there is need to determine where a Christian faith sits here on the spectrum of any claim. Daniel Migliore regards heaven as a classical symbol of that final reconciliation with God (Migliore 2004). Alistair McGrath reckons that human beings have only a limited ability to appreciate that which lies beyond the horizon of their present experiences and rely on analogies provided by God (McGrath 2004.). H. Orton Wiley and Paul Culbertson regard heaven as both a state and a place( Wiley & Culbertson 1946) and Bloesch\(^22\) regards heaven as one of those mysteries which lie beyond human comprehension”: yet we can know some things about these future realities, for Scripture is not silent, though it is circumspect” (Bloesch, 2004 p. 229). Max Lucado\(^23\) is one contemporary writer who emphasizes the reality of heaven in a restored and re-created cosmos (Lucado 2007).

However, problems arose when Christians in the early church began to absorb the idea of a perishable body and an immortal soul. Moltmann claims that heaven became the place for the

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\(^{21}\) Moet is an extremely expensive brand of Champagne.

\(^{22}\) Bloesch, an evangelical writer, gives no more than a few pages in his 2006 work on heaven. Apparently he does not consider this to be a major issue in Eschatology.

\(^{23}\) His writings are for the popular market.
redeemed soul, and people longed for heaven rather than realistically anticipating God’s kingdom. People saw heaven and earth as separate identities.

Moltmann discusses the subject of heaven at length in his 1985 Gifford lectures\textsuperscript{24}. For the moment it will be sufficient to say that the idea of going to heaven with a disembodied soul may be a nice platitude but the Christian hope relies more on substance than platitudes. As we shall see later, Moltmann considers that the Scriptures provide this substance on which to build one’s hope.

The concept of hope is also expressed by many world religions. For the Jews, hope has yet to be fulfilled, the promised Messiah is still to come. In Islam Allah determines the course of a person’s life. Hope seems to be pointless. For Buddhism and Hinduism existence is cyclic, one hopes to be reborn in a new life. However, the new life will be lived in a broken world.

Reincarnation, also known as transmigration of souls, is the doctrine of the rebirth of the existent soul. It is characteristic of many Eastern religions, and has penetrated the fringes of Christianity in the form of Gnosticism (\textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}, 2003 p. 1564). This form of thinking has a subtle influence on modern society. Nothing is to be done to the world: rebirth is an entirely personal matter. There is no future for creation. It continues in an endless cycle of existence. Moltmann briefly discusses re-incarnation in his 2004 work \textit{In the End - The Beginning}

The attraction of reincarnation of the individual person within a wider world:

\begin{quote}
If the souls of human beings, animals and plants are seen in the great cohesion of the world soul, then we are all living together in an ensouled cosmos (Moltmann, 2004 p.113).
\end{quote}

He makes the point that the Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam strongly believe that people are made in the image of God, not as replicas of God. In the same volume he discusses at greater length the subject of immortality saying that, while the Platonic idea stresses

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{24} Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, pp. 163-184
\end{flushright}
If God is God, God’s relationship to his human image cannot be destroyed either through the contrariety of sin or through the death of human beings. Only God himself could dissolve the relationship he has entered into towards those he has created. (Moltmann, 2004 p.106).

I will now comment on these disparate types of hope before I consider how Moltmann understands of the Christian hope. Firstly, most of these conceptions of what could be possible occur within the present world. It is easy to dream of a society without the violence, crimes, and evils which we read in the daily news. One can imagine a quality of life enhanced by a spirituality which engenders tranquility, peace, and contentment. Ageing people can dream about living longer and recovering some of the vitality of youth. It is even possible to conceive of a celestial heaven “up there” removed from the agonies and travails of the present world, as exemplified by the use of the last rites. Secondly, most of these hopes may be achievable through human endeavour. Society can be improved by legislation, reform or even through revolution. Ageing people can, so those who promote life extension programmes claim, decide and adjust their present lifestyle to live longer, even with medical intervention. Finally, many people can find their deeper spirituality through exploration, meditation and contemplation. Thirdly many people feel that if they are good enough they can arrive at a celestial heaven. Finally, some of these hopes may not necessarily require any action by God, or by any deity at all. Improving society can be a secular task, exploring spirituality can, as we have seen, appeal to those who have a diversity of belief, and life-extension simply requires lifestyle modification and future medical intervention.

A comment from Groopman, written in 2004, may be appropriate at this point:

I thought about true hope versus false hope. False hope does not recognize the risks and dangers that true hope does. False hope can lead to intemperate choices and flawed decision making. True hope takes into account the real threats that exist and seeks to navigate the best path around them. (Groopman, 2004p.198).
While there is some value and while some material for help can be gained from some of these forms of hope, they provide nothing of any real substance, only fantasies and hints of what could be possible. We must be very careful not to generate a sense of false hope.
Chapter 4

Moltmann’s Understanding of Hope.

We have recognized that we live in a world which is on the brink of despair and desperately needs hope. Ageing people live in this world, and hope can become elusive. The very foundational things which they have in their past clung to have been shaken. As well as these things they, as a group, have suffered more losses, their youth is spent, their vigour gone, their friends and loved ones are disappearing. With endless cycles of pain and disability can come a round of depression and despair. Missy Buchanan (2010) expresses the dilemma of old age in these words:

The pictures on the glossy brochure show older adults playing tennis and dancing in sparkly clothes. They seem to be having the time of their lives. That was me too, once upon a time. But not now. But somewhere between then and now, things change. My limbs became stiff, my mind less alert. Now I’ve come to accept the fleeting stages of old age. There is no use in skirting the truth: If you live long enough, aching bones and slow steps will come. (Buchannan, 2010 p.18).

We have looked at the possibilities of generic hopes. Those are the ones that seemed to solve all those problems but, often as not, they created new ones, and the progress became a nightmare. We were chasing unobtainable dreams. We have explored our spiritual nature only to find that deep down nothing changed. We have tried to extend our lives only to delay the inevitable outcome. We have tried to escape to a celestial paradise. In truth we must agree with the words of the Teacher of old who wrote:

“Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1.2)
Here is a world bereft of any sense of meaning, seemingly without any sense of hope.

And yet Jurgen Moltmann found hope and built his theology upon this and the cardinal virtue of hope. It is the voice of experience over the voice of innocence. He wrote about it and continues to write about the future with a very positive note, saying in 2004:

Christian experience is about the beginning; the beginning of true life, the beginning of God’s kingdom, and the beginning of the new creation of all things into their enduring form (Moltmann, 2004 p.xv)

These words were written when Moltmann was 78. When he was 86 he was still writing about hope: “Christians have to live in accordance with the divine hope and the claim of Christ” (Moltmann 2012 p.xiii). Moltmann’s focus on hope is constant in spite of periodical vicissitudes, including his own experiences of endings and ageing.

What is there about Moltmann’s thinking which provides us with this certainty? In this chapter we will look at the main features of Moltmann’s idea of hope and compare them with the ideas of those who promote the various forms of generic hope, and those who would extend human life. We will also contrast his ideas of hope with that of those who promote spirituality and with that of those who would confine hope to a longing for a celestial heaven. We will argue that Moltmann’s idea of hope is a biblical one and based on his personal experience yet can contradict the present situation, which could seem to be hopeless.

Moltmann reaches back into the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. As an older man he reflected on that which sustained his inner life as a young man but which had failed. When he was 82 he wrote:

My spiritual sustenance had been Goethe’s poems, … They had awakened the emotions of the boy, but now, locked into the dark huts with 200 other prisoners, they had nothing more to say to me. My dream of mathematics and physics was lost to me too. What was the point of it all? Then there were those sleepless nights when the tormenting memories rose up and I woke up soaked in sweat … the one with whom, and the one who was struggling with me, only became clearer to me later. (Moltmann, 2002 p. 26).
He received a Bible from a chaplain, and began reading without understanding it until he read Psalm 39, a psalm of lament where the psalmist lamented his forsaken condition. Moltmann found a description of his own experience. Then he read the Gospel of Mark and found the companionship of Jesus, in his experience of death and was slowly “seized by a great hope for the resurrection into God’s space” (Moltmann, 2008 p.30).

This early companionship with Jesus, the brother in suffering and the companion on the road to the land of freedom, has never left me since, and I became more and more assured of it. I have never decided for Christ once and for all, as is often demanded of us. …But right down to the present day, after almost 60 years, I am certain that then, in 1945, and there, in the Scottish prisoner of war camp, in the dark pit of my soul, Jesus sought me, and found me… (Moltmann, 2008 p.30).

This sense of personal experience remained with him and has underscored his theology. His theological education began in the Norton camp, established by a wealthy American benefactor, to train prospective teachers and pastors where “Captive lecturers taught captive students” (Moltmann, 1997 p 13).

His subsequent education back in Germany had a strong biblical basis. Through Helmut Traub he learnt of Karl Barth’s emphasis on the sovereignty of God, from Hans Joachim Inwood he discovered the young Luther and Luther’s theology of the cross enthralled him. From Joachim Jeremias he learnt of the historical Jesus and from Otto Weber he became aware of Reformed theology. So the young Moltmann was inspired by the best of solid biblical theology. (Moltmann, 2008 p.41-51.)

When Moltmann graduated he looked for a church, being attracted to the groups which had followed the confessing Church and allied themselves with Barthian theology, finally settling on a branch of the Reformed church. At this stage Protestant theology in Germany was dominated by Barth. Moltmann himself reflected on how much Barth had contributed, so he wrote: “I thought that there could be no more theology after Barth, because he had said everything and said it so
well” (Moltmann, 2008 p.47). As a young pastor, in his first parish, he attended a conference of theologians and heard Arnold Van Ruler from Utrecht, in Holland:

Van Ruler convinced me that Barth had not after all already said everything, and moreover that he would not have said very well everything that theology has to say today. He put me on the track of the forward hope in eschatology for the kingdom of God and his righteousness on this earth (Moltmann, 2008 p.65)

It was Van Ruler who introduced the young Moltmann towards a study of eschatology and thereby set the course of his thinking.

Moltmann decided to become a pastor instead of becoming a teacher as had been his father. He was committed to reconstructing his shattered homeland. As a result he chose to study theology both in the prisoner of war camps and later in his own country. He could have chosen many topics in theology such as involvement in politics or supporting the feminist viewpoint, but Moltmann chose to focus on eschatology which for him is the basis of Christianity. He discovered that eschatology, which included the return of Christ, the general judgment, the resurrection of the dead and the new creation, once called the doctrine of the last things was, in fact, the very centre of theology. He claims that “from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving” (Moltmann, 1967 p.16).

A chance encounter led him to read, while on holidays, Ernst Bloch’s book Principle of Hope, and later meet with the man himself. Bloch was a Marxist, an atheist and a Jew who cited the Bible extensively and grasped what the church at the time failed to understand - that is the importance of eschatology. It is somewhat of an irony that such a man could influence one who at the time was teaching theology in a Christian institution. This encounter with Bloch led Moltmann further into the subject of hope: “So I set out to search for a theology of hope” (Moltmann, 2008 p.79). Bloch had grasped the importance of the future but remained a Jewish atheist. Moltmann had no desire to convince Bloch to become a Christian, but rather looked for a theological parallel
to Bloch’s atheistic principle of hope. The various threads and the challenge to answer Bloch came together in his 1964 *Theology of Hope*. He wrote in the preface to his work:

The following efforts bear the title *Theology of Hope*, not because they set out once again to present eschatology as a separate doctrine…their aim is to show how theology can set out from hope and begin to consider its theme in an eschatological light (Moltmann, 1964)

Concerning this, he later wrote that “I had become internationalized, but in the process also thoroughly controversial” (Moltmann, 2008 p. 99). For the book “met its kairos” (Moltmann 2008 p.99), that is its appointed destiny. Hope was in the public arena: in Czechoslovakia an easing of the rigid authority of communism was taking place; in Rome the Second Vatican Council had begun; in the United States the efforts of Martin Luther King were gaining momentum and in Cuba in 1959 a successful revolution under Fidel Castro emerged. A new beginning world wider was emerging “Common to all these new beginnings was hope: with the power of hope one could let go of the old and begin something new” (Moltmann 2008 p.100). After *Theology of Hope* was published eschatology became more important to him. This emphasis on eschatology and hope has influenced all of his writings since. Writing in 2004 – at the age of 78 he reflected on how “the Christian hope is the power of resurrection from life’s failures and defeats” (Moltmann 2004 p ix).

At over 86 years the ageing Moltmann is a theological giant in his own right, being in this 21st century, a living link to other theological giants of the 19th and 20th centuries, with such men as Harnack, Barth, Bultmann, Kasemann, Von Rad and Hegel, all of whom he cites. Moltmann stresses the importance of the Bible. In 1997 he noted that whereas among the established churches any serious study of the Bible has been neglected, among the developing churches it has become more prominent. He urges people “to read the Bible with new perception, with open eyes” (Moltmann, 1975 p.7). Nevertheless, Moltmann does not regard Scripture as being the infallible word of God, meaning that he can adopt theological positions on some issues which differ from orthodox Christianity, such as his attitude towards hell and universalism. The Scriptures are a
witness to God's promissory work: “For Moltmann the Bible is not itself revelation, and is not verbally inspired, but is a witness to the promissory history of God” (Grenz & Olson, 1992 p.178). This is a significant statement. Far from being the inerrant record, dictated by God Himself, the Bible tells of God's actions in the past which will be our future. “Every text in the Bible narrates the past in order to announce the future” (Moltmann, 1975 p.7). In the same volume he states:

I am not advocating a naïve biblicism. If we read the Bible with the eyes of suffering we shall realize that the Bible is a most revolutionary and even subversive book. It does not have its time behind it two thousand years ago, but rather ahead of it, because it points even beyond our present time into the future of God…it was not without design that the reading of the Bible was forbidden to the simple folk by pagan lords and a lordly Christian church. (Moltmann, 1975 p.8).

Again, in 1975, he reminds us that the new is a marked future of Scripture:

On every page of the New Testament, we meet the word new, the new covenant, new tongues, a new heaven, a new earth, and finally the God whose last word is “behold I make all things new” (Moltmann, 1975p.9).

Traditionally, the Christian hope was contained within those doctrines associated with eschatology, the “last things” (Moltmann, 1967 p.15). In practice the emphasis on the finality of all existence meant that any study of hope came after other doctrines were expounded: “They were like a loosely attached appendix that wandered off into obscure irrelevancies” (Moltmann, 1967 p. 15). Certain phenomena “Were to break into the world and put an end to the history in which all things live and move” (Moltmann, 1967 p. 15). He argued in his early work that the whole of Christianity is a matter of hope, “from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, looking forward and forward moving” (Moltmann,1976 p. 16). This means that God’s kingdom is here, being “present here as a promise of hope for the future of all things” (Moltmann, 1967 p.223).

Moltmann stresses the promissory nature of the Christian hope. As we shall see this hope contradicts the present situation. In the Old Testament, Israel’s God revealed Himself through a
promise, unlike Hellenistic or Canaanite traditions, the deities of which revealed themselves through historical or mythical epiphanies. Moltmann (1967) comments;

Israel was but little concerned to understand the essential meaning of the “appearance” of Yawheh in terms of such hallowing of places and times but for Israel the appearing God is immediately linked up with the uttering of a word of divine promise (Moltmann, 1967 p.99).

Such promise points to an unrecognized future which cannot be determined from present circumstances.

While in the tortuous course of Israel’s history the form and content of the promise changed from a nationalistic expectation towards a universal future, this hope was always directed toward God, to His future and ultimate reign of peace and righteousness on earth. As we shall see later, this aspect of hope has cosmic expectations

Moltmann argues for a promissory Christology in the New Testament. Unlike the other forms of hope which we have considered, the Christian one is not abstract. Its hope is based on the person of Jesus Christ, on his crucifixion and resurrection. He writes “The life work, death, and resurrection of Jesus … are described in the categories of expectation that are appropriate to the God of promise” (Moltmann, 1967 p. 143). He continues, “Christ is the same one who was crucified, of God-forsakenness and the nearness of God” (Moltmann, 1967 p.143). Rather than being a precursor of a general resurrection of the dead the resurrection of Jesus confirms the promise to all that death will be abolished.

Those who decline to exercise hope may well perceive the present reality to be one of brokenness and despair, of injustice or ugliness. Ageing people may only see their pain, their agony, their loneliness, or their desolation. Moltmann agrees that these things exist, but states that the Christian hope does not deny the things which appear to be reality: “death is death, and decay is putrefying decay. Guilt remains guilt and suffering remains” (Moltmann, 1967 p.19). Yet nowhere in his writings does Moltmann acquiesce to that which is ugly. He can take a strong stand because hope for him is a protest against the things that appear to be reality. He writes that “Hope
finds in Christ not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering’’ (Moltmann, 1967 p. 21).

In a similar vein, Moltmann argues that the Christian hope can even withstand catastrophes, which are very much a part of our daily living. He writes, “limitations, thwartings, and impediments play a part in our own biographies” (Moltmann, 2004 p. 31). In fact, biblical theology is catastrophic theology. The primeval flood threatening the existence of humankind, the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people threatening the survival of faith and the crucifixion of Jesus were catastrophes of tremendous proportions. Yet hope survived these catastrophes:

Whether this world will come to an end, and whatever that end may be, the Christian hope says: God’s future has already begun. With Christ’s resurrection from the catastrophe of Golgotha the new beginning has already been made, a beginning which will never again pass away because it issues from the victory over transience (Moltmann, 2004 p. 48).

So for Moltmann the power of hope can transcend the most violent of disasters.

Emphasis and a desire for a good future is not particularly Christian; indeed it is a common desire for all forms of hope. Advocates of generic hopes may seek to extrapolate what could be from present possibilities, but the Christian hope is based on God’s promises, and may well find not indication of fulfillment in the present situation, not even any possibility of any likely outcome. Those who would extend life may enjoy the present life with all of its good things, but, as we have seen, growing old does not produce vigour and strength. Those who prefer a celestial heaven may enjoy their dreams, while those who insist on an apocalyptic end for the present evil world will delight to see the destruction of the world and escape to the paradise reserved for them. At the best these forms of hope may be an incoherent expression of an innate potential within the human psyche. At the worst, they may be a false hope, deluding people.
Ageing people need a hope of substance, something ready and capable of withstanding that immense pressure of cultural despair. Jürgen Moltmann found such a hope which lifted him from despair.

“I waited patiently for the Lord;
    he inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the desolate pit,
    out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
    making my steps secure.” (Psalm 40.1)

He concludes his *Theology of Hope* saying that the Church is comprised of pilgrim people who are on the way towards a future promised by God. As a result, ageing people can find much more substance in the eschatological promises of God than in other forms of hope.
Chapter 5

A God of Suffering and a God of Hope.

We have seen that Juergen Moltmann found a deep hope which lifted him from the pit of despair and that this hope was focused on God. That sense of hope never left him, for time and time again, particularly in his later writings, he retold his story: “What looked at the beginning like a grim fate became an underserved rich blessing.” (Moltmann, 1997 p.8).

We now live in a society which is more pluralistic in its patterns of belief. The Christian faith in which Moltmann’s understanding of hope is only one in a number of systems in a contemporary Western society. This is now a society which is secular, post Christian and multifaith. The basis on which Moltmann’s hope is established is contested.

The most obvious alternative world view is a secular atheism. In recent decades its advocates have become more visible and arguably more militant. The most notable are Richard Dawkins, who, in 2006, wrote The God Delusion and Christopher Hitchens with his personal story The Rage against God: How atheism led me to faith. Their primary concern is to show that human existence is constant with high peaks and low troughs and hope is entirely a human achievement. There is no place for God or, for that matter, any supernatural power.

Richard Dawkins strongly espouses an atheistic belief, while Warren Bonett in The Australian Book of Atheism has edited a collection of some thirty-two articles by leading atheists in Australia. Many of these writers are not well known, although some such as Dr. Phillip Nitschke have become famous through his promotion of euthanasia. He feels that elderly people who have a terminal illness as well as younger people who feel that their pain in unbearable should have the right to end life without any reference to God. There is, therefore, a significant proportion of the population which denies the existence of God.25 In fact, since the collapse of

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25 In Australia, for the 2011 Census 22.3% of the population did not state their religious affiliation.
many of the totalitarian states which supported and promoted atheism, there has been a corresponding rise in militant atheism.

Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of the world’s population still believes in a God of some sort or another. Gary Bouma believes that in Australia today there is a sense of spirituality which is deeper than organized religion.

Adherents of Islam, Judaism or Christianity believe in the one true deity, whether Allah, Jehovah or God. Moltmann has much to say about Judaism, especially as it shares the Old Testament with Christianity. He engages with a wide range of Jewish thinkers such as Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin: the Holocaust was a burning issue in post-war Germany and he was concerned to establish a post-Holocaust theology. His dialogue with Judaism began early in his career. We will see later in this chapter how he used the thinking of Abraham Heschel in developing his argument on divine passability. He is also interested in a secular society. In 1995, at the age of 66, he undertook a tour of China. But he shows no interest in Eastern religions. He has an acquaintance with the Koran, but feels that the Islamic conception of God is far different to the Christian concept of God.

Moltmann is interested in the differences within the Christian community, for even within Christianity there are different strands of belief and many nuances of doctrine.

In this kind of changed context there is more debate on how we speak rightly of God. And one of the more recent proponents is Sally McFague. Writing in Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age McFague argues that in the present time we need new ways of describing God and some care needs to be exercised in this regard. We are dealing with a theology which has been moulded and shaped by generations of thinkers who interacted with their contemporary philosophers. So, in order to establish a connection with faith held by older people, we need to

(ABS 2012-13).
establish what sort of theology applied in the formative years of their lives by the expectations of a particular period of history and consequently how their view of God has been shaped. Most older people are content to rest in their inherited theology. We are dealing here with deeply embedded theologies which have been, often unconsciously, influenced by hymns, sermons, and Sunday school teaching.

In this chapter we will see how the thinkers of the Christian gospel interacted with their contemporary culture to produce images of God, some of which were detrimental to the Christian hope. McFague thinks that to make the gospel relevant for any generation a range of metaphors is needed including that of mother, lover, and friend; in doing so she stresses the saving, healing tasks of God. As friend she stresses the sustaining power of God. The world is valuable to God. Her image of God is a warm, comfortable, and comforting God, one which sustains hope. McFague prefers these models to ones which are monarchical, distant and remote. This is helpful for ageing people, especially for those who could feel lonely and isolated.

Moltmann does not deal with McFague; in fact, there is no mention of her name in any of his books written after 1987. His interest lies instead in demonstrating that God is a suffering God. As Richard Bauckham says concerning Moltmann’s theology there is a sense of solidarity which meant that the God the Son dies and God the Father suffers grief and agony. Hyung-Kim (1988-9) writes that:

In connection with the theism versus atheism controversy he (Moltmann) develops a theory of the “Suffering God.” The Cross of Christ represents not merely the death of Jesus but God’s identification with the suffering of the world in the suffering of Christ (Hyung. - Kim, 1988-9).

Douglas John Hall (1989) feels that there is a new appreciation of the theology concerning a suffering God

The wide reception of the work of Bonhoeffer, as well as of Moltmann, Weil and many others …who in the past century have developed
conceptions of a suffering God raises an interesting question: is there a
new openness to this theology? (Hall, 1989, p 88)

The care for a suffering God must first deal with the legacy of an impassible God. Such a
God is apathetic and can neither suffer Himself nor is affected by any form of human agony. A
significant part of the legacy of ancient Greek thought was a philosophy which was taught by
Plato (428? - 347? B.C). This philosophical system evolved over a period of time into
Neoplatonism, Theism and Deism. The central feature of this philosophical tradition is that God
is a being who is remote from humanity, untouched by human suffering and has left humanity to
its own efforts. This philosophy has subtly influenced Christian theology to the present day,
resulting in modern confusion about the after life and the nature of God. Moltmann notes:

Right down to the present day the “apathy” axiom has left a deeper
impress on the basic concept of the doctrine of God than has the history of
Christ’s passion. Incapacity for suffering apparently counts as being the
irrelinquishable attribute of divine perfection and blessedness.
(Moltmann, 1993 p.22).

Moltmann vigorously argues against this interpretation of Christianity. In The Crucified God he
asks whether the theistic concept of God is applicable to Christian belief in the crucified God:

For metaphysics, the nature of divine being is determined by its unity and
indisvisibility, its lack of beginning and end, its immovability and
immutability. As the entire nature of being is conceived of for the sale of
finite being, it must embrace all the determinations of finite being and
exclude those determinations which are directed against being. Otherwise
finite being could not find a support and stay against the nothingness of
death, suffering, and chaos in the divine being. Death, suffering, and
mortality must therefore be excluded from the divine being.
Christian theology has adopted this concept of God from philosophical
theology down to the present day, because in practice down to the
present day Christian faith has taken into itself the religious need of finite,
threatened, and mortal man for security in a higher omnipotence and
authority (Moltmann, 1974 p. 214).

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26 Plato established an academy at Athens where he taught his form of philosophy. Later teachers, one of which was
Plotinus in 3rd Century B.C developed a form of Platonism known as Neoplatonism. While the official teaching ceased
in the 6th Century the influence of neoplatonism continued over the centuries, particularly through the influence of
Augustine in Western Europe. The influence of neoplatonism carried on in English literature in the 17th and 18th
centuries. (Platonism).
The crucified God and the deity of the philosophers have nothing in common; they can not be reconciled. As he explores the crucifixion of Jesus Christ Moltmann finds that there is a confrontation between Christian theology of the cross and the philosophical knowledge of God. He continues the argument in a later work, *The Trinity and Kingdom*, pointing out that the God construed by philosophers cannot suffer. He wrote:

> The absolute subject of nominalist and idealist philosophy is also incapable of suffering; otherwise it would not be absolute … for the divine substance is founder and sustainer of this world of transient phenomena; it abides eternal and so it cannot be subjected to the world’s destiny (Moltmann, 1993 p.21).\(^\text{27}\)

Such a God, who is far removed from human beings, is not in a position to provide hope. This modeling of God leaves people to find hope elsewhere. In fact, Moltmann focuses not so much on the creator God, but the crucified one. He is an affront to that deity of the philosophers. To emphasize this stance Moltmann begins *The Crucified God* by saying:

> The cross is not and cannot be loved. Yet only the crucified Christ can bring the freedom which changed the world because it is no longer afraid of death. In his time the crucified Christ was regarded as a scandal and as foolishness (Moltmann, 1974 p.1).

Furthermore, the gospels present a Christ who is subject to passions,\(^\text{28}\) such as the anger expressed at the Pharisees when they placed a man with a withered hand before him (Mk 3.5), at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11.35) and His distress at Gethsemane (Mk 14-62). Consequently, God knows full well the extent of human suffering, having suffered on the cross of Christ. So he continues to argue that the Christian and Platonic concepts of God cannot be reconciled.

Moltmann thus develops the doctrine of theopathy, in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. He sets out to show that there has been, throughout the centuries, a slender thread of theologians who started their deliberations not from the apathy of God but from his passion:

\(^{27}\) The original work was written in 1981 but I am citing from the 1993 Fortress printing.

\(^{28}\) “Or does God himself suffer in Christ on our behalf?” (Moltmann, 1993 p.21).
God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings. To this extent he is “apathetic.” But he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being. In so far he is “pathetic” (Moltmann, 1993p.22).

It was Origen who first recognized this distinction, and developed the doctrine of theopathy, as he wrote of the suffering of God who himself bore our sins. When Origen talks about God’s suffering, he means the suffering of love, the compassion which is at the heart of mercy and pity.

The merciful, the pitiful person participates in the suffering of another, he takes on the other’s sufferings on himself he suffers for others. For Origen this suffering is divine suffering. It is the suffering of God, who bears the world by bearing its burdens. (Moltmann, 1993 p.24).

Moltmann claims that throughout history there has been a slender support for the doctrine of theopathy. He draws on the Jewish writer Abraham Heschel, J.K Mozely and C.E.Rolt in England, a Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno, and finally the Russian Orthodox thinker Nicolas Berdyaev. It was Graham Studdert Kennedy who popularized the thinking of theopathy.

Abraham Heschel used the Old Testament view of the Shekinah, the visible presence of God, who as Moltmann comments:

Through his Shekinah God is present in Israel. Together with Israel he suffers persecutions. Together with Israel he goes into exile as a prisoner. Together with the martyrs he experiences the torments of death. (Moltmann, 1993 p.28),

God and Israel experience the agony of suffering together, and both wait to be delivered. This deliverance comes about through the suffering of God Himself. Moltmann traces the thought of the emptying of God Himself through the thoughts of Jewish mystics, stating:

Through this belief Israel’s suffering is embedded in God’s suffering, and the glorifying of God in the world is linked with Israel’s redemption. This faith in the God who suffers with Israel is the inexhaustible source of the power which saves the persecuted people from despair and paralysis, and keeps its disappointed hopes alive. (Moltmann, 1993 p.28).
In the English-speaking world Mozley and Rolt argued for a passionate God who fully engages human suffering:

This means that God’s eternal bliss is not based on the absence of suffering. On the contrary, it is bliss through suffering’s acceptance and transformation. In the eternal joy of the Trinity, pain is not avoided; it is accepted and transmuted into glory. (Moltmann 1993 p.34).

Moltmann finds the third strand in the theology of the passionate God through the Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel Unamuno (1884–1936) who developed a theology of the infinite sorrow of God. He argues that God without sorrow is not a real God, only an inhuman one whereas a “loving God shows that he is a living God through his suffering” (Moltmann, 1993 p.38). The final strand which Moltmann considers lies in the writing of Nicolas Berdyaev, a thinker from the Russian Orthodox tradition.

Berdyaev therefore calls the true tragedy of human history the tragedy of God, who wants freedom, and can only create and preserve through the suffering of his love. (Moltmann, 1993 p.43).

This raises the whole subject of theodicy, the existence of suffering and pain. The atheist uses the existence of pain and suffering to protest against the existence of God. He asks: Where is God in the presence of suffering, particularly that of innocent suffering? While some suffering may be attributed in part to human greed, an earthquake is completely outside the realm of human activity. One such earthquake occurred on Boxing Day 2004 resulting in a massive tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Many innocent lives were lost and the beaches of the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean were littered with bodies, many of whom were quite young. At times some people have made a distinction between the suffering of a young person and that of an older adult, but both have agonies that are very limiting for their respective lives. David Hart says:

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29 Rolt taught that God was omnipotent but that this omnipotence comes from the cross- he suffers evil and thereby transforms it.
30 Unamuno takes a different approach. God dwells within His creation and feels its pain. He longs for its deliverance.
31 Berdyaev takes his starting point from the creation of humanity; God wants and longs for human beings.
rather than showing us how the tears of a small girl suffering in the dark were necessary for the building of the Kingdom, he will instead raise her up and wipe away all tears from her eyes … and the shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain, for the former things will have passed away, and he that sits upon the throne will say, “Behold, I make all things new” (Hart, 2005 p. 104).

Moltmann argues that this is only a form of protest: “It is only the desire, the thirst for God, which turns suffering into conscious pain” (Moltmann, 1993, p.48).

Moltmann argues that both atheism and theism fail to answer the question of suffering, particularly that of innocent suffering. The response lies, not in denying the existence of God or his involvement in the affairs of humanity but by looking forward to the new world. Moltmann concludes that:

The question of theodicy is not a speculative question; it is a critical one. It is the all embracing eschatological question. It is not purely theoretical, for it cannot be answered with any new theory about the existing world. It is a practical question which will only be answered in the new world …the person who believes will not rest content with any slickly explanatory answer to the theodicy question. And he will also rest content with any attempts to soften the question down. The more a person believes, the more deeply he experienced pain over the suffering in the world, and the more passionately he asks about God and the new creation. (Moltmann, 1993 p.49).

Moltmann then proceeds to discuss the subject of God’s freedom. God is free to do as He wants to do and has the freedom to disclose Himself. This means that the creation of the world and human beings for freedom and fellowship is always bound up with the process of God’s deliverance from the sufferings of his love, which liberates, delivers, and redeems through suffering to each its fulfillment in the love that is bliss. But love only finds bliss when it finds its beloved, liberates them, and has them eternally at its side. For that reason and in this sense, the deliverance or redemption of the world is bound up with the self-deliverance of God from his sufferings. In this sense not only does God suffer with and for the world: liberated men and women suffer with God and for him. (Moltmann, 1993 p. 60).
God who is free, yet permits Himself to experience suffering, is the One who provides hope to his creation is the One who is with us. He knows the pain and anguish of human suffering and this God shares our human predicament. Emmanuel - God with us - is the name given in the Scripture to our God. The God of suffering is the God of Hope.

Studdert Kennedy, writing from the trenches of the First World War, expressed the confrontation between the impassible deity and the Christ of the Gospel in the words of “The Comrade God”:

Thou who dost dwell in depths of timeless being,
  Watching the years as moments passing by,
Seeing the things that lie beyond our seeing,
  Constant, unchanged as aeons dawn and die;

Thou who canst count the stars upon their courses,
  Holding them all in the hollow of Thy hand,
Lord of the world with all its myriad of forces
  Seeing the hills as single grains of sand;

Art Thou so great that this our bitter crying
  Sounds in Thine ears like sorrow of a child?
Hast Thou looked down on centuries of sighing,
  And, like a heartless mother, only smiled?
Since in Thy sight to-day is as to-morrow,
  And while we strive Thy victory is won,
Hast Thou no tears to shed upon our sorrow?
  Art Thou a staring splendour like the sun?

Dost Thou not heed the helpless sparrow’s falling?
  Canst Thou not see the tears that women weep?
Canst Thou not hear Thy little children calling?
  Doest Thou not watch above them as they sleep?
Then, O my God, Thou art too great to love me,
  Since Thou dost reign beyond the reach of tears,
Calm and serene as the cruel stars above me,
  High and remote from human hopes and fears.

Only in Him can I find home to hide me,
  Who on the Cross was slain to rise again;
Only with Him, my Comrade God, beside me,
  Can I go forth to war against sin and pain.

(Studdert Kennedy, 1937, p.30-31)
These words were written by a thirty-two year old man who was ministering to younger men, many of whom did not live to see old age. Human suffering is more than undergoing death or disability by bayonet, bullet or shrapnel. It may mean the agony of continued pain, sleepless nights, loss of friends and family or of youthful vitality or any one of the disabilities which affect people of any age. The Comrade God stands beside the person of any age experiencing distress of any sort. He is the God who knew suffering and stands beside the sufferer.

The verses of a hymn once sang long ago is very apt to our discussion at this point:

Our sufferings, Lord to Thee are known,
    For Thou wast tempted once like us;
Regard our grief, regard Thine own,
    When hanging bleeding on the cross.

Art Thou not touched with human woe?
    Hath pity left the Son of Man?
Dost Thou not all our sorrows know,
    Who hadst a share in all our pain?  (Salvation Army Tune Book, 1953 p.18)

The other major cultural influence which interacted on Christianity was Stoicism. While it was more of an ethical system than a religion, it was very attractive in that it helped one to improve one’s life. This meant that moral worth, duty and justice are singularly Stoic emphases, together with a certain sternness of mind. For the moral person is neither merciful, nor shows pity, because each suggests a deviation from duty and from the calmness that rules the world. Also, pain, pleasure or fear has no place in Stoicism. The Stoic God was unmoved by suffering, since he was immune from suffering. Stoicism was to influence Christianity, more of an undercurrent than a direct theological input, in the period when Christian theology and churches were being formed. The apologists needed to refute this subtle influence, and one significant Patristic author, Lactantius, raised the question of God’s providence, the ability of God to reward the righteous and at the same time to punish the sinner. His work, De Ira Dei, claimed that anger was an essential part of God’s nature. It is significant that Stoicism enjoyed a new phase of interest in Europe
during the Renaissance period when reason and the ability to think predominated. Moltmann makes no mention of Stoicism. He continues to stress the Hebraic nature of the gospel against Greek philosophy.

Anyone who believes in God must be clear about the God in whom they believe. Is he a product of Greek philosophy, an apathetic deity who rules the world from afar or in he involved in the agonies and sufferings of his creation? The latter is the biblical tradition; the former an encrustation laid upon Christianity over centuries of interaction with philosophy.

The ageing person needs a clear understanding as to the kind of God they exercise their faith. Juergen Moltmann has cleared away much misunderstanding and has challenged areas of unbelief. This God, who Himself suffers with his creation provides hope.
Chapter 6.

The God of Promise.

We have seen how Moltmann found a lifetime of hope in a God who was familiar with human suffering. We have found that this God was different from the deity postulated by philosophers, insofar as Moltmann believed in a God who feels pain and suffered with the lost of humanity. As a young man he himself had lost everything, even hope, in the devastation of defeat and imprisonment during the war years. He had rediscovered hope, nevertheless a Christian hope, through reading the Scriptures. At first, he read the Bible casually and without much understanding, but he came to the psalms of lament, particularly Psalm 39 which echoed his own experience. Reflecting on this later in his life he wrote:

These psalms gave me the words for my own suffering. They opened my eyes to the God who is with those ‘that are of a broken heart’. He was present even behind the barbed wire (Moltmann, 2000 p.8).

Later, Moltmann read the Gospel of Mark, in particular, the account of Jesus’ crucifixion where Jesus cried out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Mark 15 . 34). Moltmann found the companionship of one who understood his agony and distress. This sense of companionship remained with him for the rest of his life:

Because I believe that I owe my survival to these experiences, I cannot even say I found God there. But I do know in my heart that it is there that he found me, and that I would otherwise have been lost. (Moltmann, 2000, p. 9).

Later on in his life, while exploring the theme of the crucified one, who allowed himself to be crucified Moltmann wrote:

did not become man according to our conceptions of being a man He became the kind of man we do not want to be: an outcast, accursed, crucified. Ecce homo Behold the man! is not a statement which arises from the confirmation of our humanity and is made on the basis of
‘like is known by like’; it is a confession of faith which recognizes God’s humanity in the dehumanized Christ on the cross! (Moltmann 1974, p.205).

So Moltmann found in the Bible, which Christians accept as revealed truth and ultimate source of authority, a hope which remained with him for his whole life.

There are many ways of understanding Scripture. It could be read as a textbook for ethics, as containing a guide for good behaviour – the Sermon on the Mount is the guide. People who do not even enter a church accept the golden rule, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets”. However admirable these ethical injunctions may be, they remain only good guidelines for living. Then the Scriptures contain the history of an oppressed people, who found liberation and freedom and, at the same, time kept their faith. The Bible could also be read as the tale of individual people who have shown courage and fortitude over the centuries. Hebrews chapter 11 gives account of men and women who were great pioneers of faith. The book of Acts gives account of the growth of the Church. These stories are exciting, and are held out as examples of steadfastness and faithfulness, but seem far removed from contemporary living and the day to day problems faced by ageing people.

Over centuries people have found comfort in times of sickness, trouble or death reading the well known passages of Scripture. Miroslav Volf states that Scripture can be read in a devotional manner or else in a critical response to outdated tenets. (Volf,2010 ) He argues that the Bible should be read as a theological text. These are but examples of ways in which the Bible could be read. Then there are others who regard the main purpose of the Bible as book of fulfilled prediction in the history of humankind. There are two significant publications which have stressed the role of prediction, Cyrus Scofield’s Bible ( Scofield Reference Bible) which relied on
predictions to date biblical events and the 1918 \textsuperscript{32} works of Clarence Larkin where the role of prophecy was emphasized. (Larkin 1921).

All of these, the ethical, the heroic and the prophetic are valid ways of reading the Scriptures and people gain some value from reading the Bible in this way. The Bible could also be read as a record of God’s promissory history, as a record of God’s activity and involvement in human history. The boundary between promise and prediction begins to be blurred. In fact, Moltmann makes the point that there is a close connection between them, saying that “promise and prophecy are so close that they are often confused” (Moltmann, 2000 p.93).

Yet they must be kept separate: a prediction foretells, or attempts to foretell, the future (Macquarie 1967 p.1107), whereas a promise is “an assurance that one will or will not undertake a certain action or behaviour” (Macquarie 1967 p.1126). The prediction simply tells what will happen in the course of history, some of which are fulfilled, whereas a promise is a declaration of what God will do in the future.

Migliore (2004) argues that some people accept the authority of the Bible yet construct an apocalyptic view of the end times which is anything but Christian. They achieve this by distortion of selected texts often taken out of context to fit in with a predetermined history. It is clear that hope itself needs to be set inside a wider range of theological distinctions. The most obvious have to do with how hope relates to eschatology, and the prophetic traditions aim to be distinguished from mere prediction.

Moltmann is not a biblical scholar, although he cites Scripture and welcomes the contributions which others have made in this area. He is not an exegete, but he is a theologian who uses Scripture. Neither is Moltmann alone in his quest for hope. He was joined in his efforts by Wolfhart Pannenberg, Johannes Metz, and Carl Braaten all of whom found that hope was

\textsuperscript{32} His work was revised in 1921.
encouraged by promise. Pannenberg asserted that the God of the Bible makes promises to his people concerning what is happening in the world (Morse, 1979). and Metz – in the light of the Holocaust - taught that promise plays an important part in revelation. But Moltmann emphasized the future of Christ. Moltmann, with his focus on eschatology, prefers to read Scripture as an account of God’s promissory action. It is his reliance on the promises of God which underscores his whole theology. John Haught expresses this truth: “But it has been especially Juergen Moltmann who has made it a central theme in contemporary systematic theology” (Haught, 1993 p.10). Wolfhart Pannenberg agrees, saying “Juergen Moltmann considered that God’s promise the only reason for the eschatological hope” (Pannenberg, 2000 p 5.).

In his early work Moltmann lamented how eschatology was related to the fringes of Christian theology:

Eschatology was long called “the doctrine of the last things’ or the ‘doctrine of the end’. By these last things were meant events will one day break upon man, history of the world at the end of time. They included the return of Christ in universal glory, the judgment of the world and the consummation of the kingdom, the general resurrection of the dead and the new creation of all things. (Moltmann, 1967 p.15).

In fact, eschatology, with its focus on the future, underscores his whole theology as he states:

The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffices everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. (Moltmann, 1967 p. 16).

The promissory record looks to the future, as Moltmann wrote in 1967:

From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. (Moltmann, 1967 p.16).

This forward looking aspect is what distinguishes the biblical tradition and gives it a character of its own. Haught makes this point:

Primal religion was chained to the cycle of seasons. Its sacramental
relation to animals, fertility and earth gave it a reality based on the repetition of natural occurrences. It was not yet aware of the radical openness of reality to the future. It remained bound to the soil, the sun, the moon, the forests, rivers and seasons. (Haught, 1993 p.84).

Haught considers that the Israelite religion developed out of such bedrock of primal religion:

The religion of Israel developed a unique version of the axial disengagement from a purely nature-orientated religion. Filled with an unexpected hope for a future fulfillment within the context of history, it no longer thought of cycles of nature in which is to be found….And it learned to think of God as one who continually holds out a promise for the future, as one who calls us to hope in a vision yet to be fulfilled. (Haught, 1993 p.85).

Primal religion held to the mystery of the deity. This was the realm of the unseen, where the forces impacted upon the daily lives of people and controlled their destiny. As Haught writes:

In former ages, the presence of a dimension of mystery could be taken for granted. It was felt quite palpably as the environing context of the world’s reality, and so auditions and visions from that realm were not altogether unexpected events. Indeed, mystery was so much a part of life’s presuppositions that there was no need to make revaluation the explicit notion it has become today. (Haught, 1993, p.44)

To explain this mystery the ancient religions required an epiphany of some sort: in ancient legends the gods would appear in human form with the result that the place where they appeared would be regarded as sacred. Moltmann claims that with ancient Israel the epiphany was different:

Now the striking thing is, that Israel was but little concerned to understand the essential meaning of the ‘appearance of Yahweh in terms of such hallowing of places and times, but for Israel the ‘appearing’ of God is immediately linked up with a word of divine promise. (Moltmann, 1967 p.99).

Moltmann explains in detail how he understands the nature of a promise made by God. A promise declares there will come to be a reality which does not exist and may well bear no relationship to the present, and gives human beings a sense of history. This means that human history is not a matter of evolution, nor a repetitive cycle of occurrences but points to a future given by the free power of God. The promise contradicts the present experience; there may be
nothing in the present experience which indicates the fulfillment. Consequently, there is between
the promise given and its fulfillment an interval during which people may exercise hope or opt for
despair. The promise can be surprisingly new. There is no point in calculating the future. On this
point Moltmann makes the following comment:

then there can be no burning interest in constructing a hard and fast juridical system of historic necessities according to a schema of promise and fulfillment – neither by demonstrating the function of such a schema in the past nor by making calculations for the future. Rather, the fulfillments can very well contain an element of newness and surprise over against the promise as it was received.


Finally, the chequered history of Israel did not mean that the promises were extinguished; rather, a continually new and wider meaning was given to the promises. Here is the answer to the challenge of the fundamentalist who follows the Scofield Bible and follows in the footsteps of Clarence Larkin: God’s future cannot be reduced to a diagrammatic scheme of definitive events. Moltmann’s idea of promise goes much further than that of prediction. A promise gives a sense of history. The present events are no isolated occurrences but are linked to each other. We see this in the way in which Moltmann links the generations of people to each other. In 2004 – when he was 78 – Moltmann wrote:

In modern societies the individual consciousness of being one’s self drives out the collective sense of existing within a succession of generations. This destroys all community with the dead. That is, they no longer have any significance, and are no longer perceived. We no longer need to take account of our ancestors…. In this way the living have come to dominate the dead.(Moltmann, 2004 p. 131).

He then proceeds to discuss the veneration paid to ancestors in traditional societies arguing that the risen Christ destroyed death’s power and took the dead into fellowship with him.

The dead are not “dead” in the modern sense; they “have a presence.”….the prospect of resurrection in the new Christian light which reverence for ancestors, and which raises this to a new level. In this light Christians in the modern Western world will also be able to turn hopefully to their dead, and through a new culture of
remembrance surmounts the compulsion to forget. (Moltmann, 2004 p.135).

Therein lies hope for elders: they are not forgotten when they die but are very much part of Christ’s community. Ageing people have heard many promises. In 1938, at Munich in Bavaria, Adolf Hitler of Germany gave a promise to Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Britain, that in return for Sudetenland he would have no further territorial ambitions (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2003 p.1227). The following year he annexed Czechoslovakia, he invaded Poland and the Second World War commenced. Each election people have been promised much, only to have their politicians fail to deliver. There have been financial schemes which promised high returns, only to face liquidation. And from time to time leaders of sects have promised much, but failed to deliver. As a result many older people are cynical when it comes to promises.

What makes Moltmann’s emphasis on divine promises any different? We see this in Moltmann’s interest in creation. He was invited to Edinburgh in 1985 to deliver the prestigious Gifford Lectures, for which he took as his theme a theology of nature and of God as creator. In the course of his lectures – published in 1985 as The God in Creation - he examined the original creation, the continuous creation, and the final creation. He wrote:

The kingdom of glory is therefore waited for ‘in heaven as on earth’ It is to renew heaven and earth. What can it bring heaven and earth? ….the kingdom of glory is the indwelling of God in his whole creation. Heaven and earth will become God’s dwelling, the surroundings that encompass him, and his milieu. (Moltmann, 1985 p.183)

Until that day comes ageing people can wait with hope. As Christopher Morse says:

God the Promisor promises to be present in all the affairs of life, and death, and destiny in the manner of the Crucified and Risen Christ. There are those whose lives attest that this is a confidence sufficient in which to live and die. (Morse, 1979 p. 132).
This is the God who is humankind’s creator. That is why Moltmann’s concept of Divine promise is different to those of secular authority. As Missy Buchanan writes concerning her own limited life and abilities:

Can you still use an old body like mine
To smile through a wrinkled face?
To caress a child with my liver-spotted hands?
Give me fresh motivation for today
And purpose until I’m all used up. (Buchanan, 2010 p.30).

God the Promisor who suffers the agony and distress of humankind provides a hope for a future, even when one cannot see a future. He provides hope for all people, particularly for those who through age have no foreseeable future.
Chapter. 7

Imortality.

In this exploration of hope we have looked at the fact of ageing, the failure of generic hopes and the futile attempts to extend human life and Moltmann’s view of God. Now we will look at the subject of immortality and, more specifically, Moltmann’s view of hope. The moment Moltmann turns to hope his theology becomes eschatological.

In this chapter we will turn to the great mystery of human existence - that is, the mystery of death. It is a path which is unique to each of us yet certain. As we have seen, Juergen Moltmann faced this part of human existence early in his life. As we age the grim reaper will come to us either through natural ageing or else through an accident of some sort. Following the Hamburg firebombing Moltmann did express the shock that he was still alive, but Moltmann does not write about the afterlife until late in his career. At the commencement of his public teaching, he was concerned to show that eschatology was central to the Christian faith and life rather than being the end of life and existence.

The standard practice of eschatology is to consider such on a cosmic scale. It embraces a variety of topics such as the battle of Armageddon, the various tribulations, the second coming of Christ, the parousia, the millennium, heaven and hell, the last judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and at a personal level, death and the prospect of an after-life. Hoekema agrees that these subjects form the basis of eschatology. He also includes for consideration the present situation of the Christian believer and the kingdom of God. Hoekema aspires after an eschatology that we might call “inaugurated” and future eschatology” (Hoekema, 1978 p.1). He arranges the subjects of his book accordingly, with the first part being a discussion of inaugurated eschatology, and the second part specific subjects relating to the future. Migliore sets eschatology in a wider context of
Christian hope (Migliore, 2000). He says that eschatology uses symbols, in which language is stretched beyond its limits, to claim that God will finally triumph over evil. Pannenberg considers that it is difficult to conceive the Christian hope (Pannenberg 2002,). Schwarz believes that Christians hope for the final revelation of God’s glory (Schwarz 2000,).

There seems to be, within the human psyche, a longing for a sense of immortality. The after-life has been the focus of universal attention ever since antiquity. Every scattered people group has some thoughts on what happens after death. For example, the ancient Egyptians believed in an imperishable soul and body. Their economy and civilization was based on preparation for the after-life. Mummification of dead corpses, inscriptions, pictures of daily life and hieroglyphics placed on the tombs bear witness to this belief. The ancient Greeks believed that after death the body disintegrated, but held that the soul of the deceased person would be conveyed to a place to await judgment or bliss. Their idea of the soul varied according to philosophical school. The ancient Hebrews held to the conception of Sheol, a place where the dead wandered in perpetual darkness in the lower regions of earth. They had little, if any, conception of an after-life with God. This was commuted to the New Testament concept of Hell.

Reincarnation is another expression of the after-life; it is basically a feature of Eastern religions and holds that the soul survives after death, and is born anew in another body. The fate of the individual is determined by the law of Karma, the result of the life led in a previous life. This idea offers a motive for self-improvement, a means of lifting life from the endless routine of daily living and a hope that the next life will be better than the present one. The doctrine of reincarnation, though condemned by the major churches survived on the fringes of Christianity. In recent decades in the West there has been through films, popular songs a renewed interest in reincarnation.
Moltmann rejects the idea of re-incarnation in his 2004 work *In the End - The Beginning*. His rejection of such is made on the biblical basis that every person is created in the image of the invisible God. They are original beings, with their own identity, not replicas. As individuals people are part of God’s created world, having a special role and responsibility within nature:

Their unique character as the image of God does not isolate them from nature; it merely describes their special task within nature. Persons are not individuals; they are beings in community, and they live in community with one another, in the community of generations, and in the community of the generations (Moltmann, 2004 p.114).

Moltmann also believes that the forgiving power of God transcends the fatalism of Karma:

The One ‘who forgives all your iniquity, and heals all your diseases’ is himself the power of life which breaks through karma and fate, replacing and endless requital by the new beginning (Moltmann, 2004 p 115).

Finally, the principle of Karma cannot explain the handicaps of the present life:

This means, finally that the cosmic law of karma can no longer be used to explain disabilities, sicknesses or suffering in this present life, putting them down to the guilt of those who have gone before us. What karmic guilt are the dead of Auschwitz supposed to have expiated? What Karmic guilt are the dead of Hiroshima supposed to have suffered? (Moltmann, 2004 p.115-116).

Reincarnation is not a satisfactory hope for older people, as it raises too many critical questions and fails to answer them. For example, is a person reborn only to continue with a life of suffering? Is there any hope of relief from an endless cycle of pain and agony? From the perspective of an ageing population the focus can irretrievably fall upon the dilemma of immortality or resurrection. The popular idea is to fasten upon the idea of immortality, which is essentially Platonic. The Greeks epitomized by Plato, held that the material body was evil, and deserved to be destroyed, the immaterial soul was immortal and indestructible. Death was a welcome friend. It released the soul from its bodily prison. The soul could enjoy life in the hereafter.
Many of the Church Fathers were themselves philosophers and used Greek philosophy to teach and evangelize (Danielou 1980). Werner Jaeger claims that the process of distinguishing between the two forms of thought was not so clear:

It took some time for the Christian authors of the ancient period to distinguish between the pagan concepts of immortality and the Christian idea of resurrection, and some of them contaminated the two unhesitatingly. In Gregory of Nyssa’s famous dialogue *De anima et ressurrectione*, written after the death of his sister Saint Macrina and recording his last conversation with her before she died, we find this typical fusion of pagan and Christian ideas expressed in the very title of the book, which contains them both. (Jaeger, 1965 p.78).

Caroline Bynum traces the history of the struggle over the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body between 220 and 1336. These dates were arbitrarily selected in order to show how people in the Middle Ages regarded the body in the future life. She writes:

The promise of bodily resurrection –the promise, that is, that the very stuff of change and putrefaction can be lifted to impassability while continuing itself – remained an oxymoron through all the centuries of the Middle Ages. (Bynum, 1995 p. 341).

In spite of varied attempts by artists to portray the hereafter, there was no suggestion of a separate existence of a disembodied soul in the middle Ages.

It was during the Enlightenment period that the influence of Platonism was felt and the existence of a disembodied soul was accepted by many people, notably in English literature and Romantic poets such as Keats, Wordsworth. Oscar Cullman re-ignited the debate in the Ingersoll lecture for 1955 and argued that between the Platonic and Christian points of view of the after-life there was a fundamental gap. The Christian viewpoint is that the body, as a creation by God would be raised up through the creative power of God. Death was no friend, but the last enemy to be destroyed by Christ.

Belief in the immortality of the soul is not belief in a revolutionary event. Immortality, in fact, is only a *negative* assertion: the soul does not die, but simply lives on. Resurrection is a *positive* assertion: the
The whole man, who has really died, is recalled to life by a new creation by God. Something has happened – a miracle of creation!
(Cullman, 1958 p.27).

The death of Socrates calmly drinking his cup of hemlock and that of Jesus wrestling with his impending death at Gethsemane epitomize the difference. Socrates could calmly accept his fate aware that his soul would survive: Jesus knew that his whole body would suffer the torments of separation from God as Professor Tasker wrote:

Jesus is filled with anguish and dismay as He becomes fully conscious of the weight of the burden. He is carrying as the Sin-bearer of mankind. (Tasker 1961 p.249).

There are two matters of concern at this point in our discussion: firstly, the nature of humankind and secondly the immortality of human beings. Ryan Topping (2007) discusses the nature of the soul as it is presented in one of Plato’s works in the Phaedo. The soul understands reality through logical reasoning, in particular that which is just, beautiful and good. (But the ugly, the distorted part of humanity is ignored as is the sinful). The body is the inferior part of a person, the soul seeks to understand the best of truth, those realities which do not change “but are permanent realities and qualify as objects of knowledge” (Topping, 2007 p.11).

By contrast, the New Testament regards the body as the creation by God. It is described as “The temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor.16.19) and Christians are required to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Ro. 12.1). Murray Harris discusses the constitution of the human being saying:

Whether we regard New Testament anthropology as basically monistic or dualistic, it cannot be said that the New Testament views man as the temporary joining of a pre-existent immortal soul with a material, mortal body. Body and soul are united in an external conjunction. The soul cannot be said to either reside in the body - or to have a body - (Harris, 1983 p.203).

With regards to the immortality of human beings, the platonic persuasion was that, as everyone possessed a soul and since this soul was indestructible, it was axiomatic that everyone should
enjoy immortality as a right. By contrast, the New Testament teaches that immortality belongs to God, but is given to humans as a gift, a future possession, “Immortality is not a gift bequeathed to all by the first Adam but an inheritance won for the righteous by the second Adam” (Harris, 1983 p.203). Harris goes on to deny the immortality of the soul in these words:

The concept of the “immortality of the soul” ill accords with the tenor of New Testament teaching and therefore the expression deserves no place in Christian terminology. (Harris, 1983 p. 237).

In the New Testament there are only 5 references to immortality, compared to 19 references to the resurrection. Two of them- 1 Timothy 1.17 and 1Timothy 6.16 state that immortality is a divine prerogative. Romans 2.7 describe the works leading to eternal life and 2 Timothy 1.10 tells us that life and immortality come through the gospel. Finally, the other reference to immortality is found in 1 Corinthians 15.53 “and this mortal body must put on immortality” where immortality comes as a consequence to the resurrection. There is no suggestion in the New Testament of the immortality of the soul. The popular idea is to fasten upon the idea of immortality, which as we have seen, is essentially Platonic. Tom Wright, writing in 2007, links Platonism with the Gnostic world view and argues that most Christians in the West have adopted a softer version of Platonism:

There has been such a massive assumption made in Western Christianity that the purpose of being a Christian is simply, or at least mainly, to ‘go to heaven when you die,” that the texts which don’t say that, but which mention heaven, are read as if they did say it, and the texts which say the opposite - are simply screened out as if they didn’t exist (Wright, 2007 p.102-103).

Such a notion does not necessarily generate the level of attraction it once did. The rise of atheism and secular practice is inclined to focus human life on the here and now. The story of Christopher Hitchens illustrates this point. At the height of his career he had just completed successful book launch when he was rushed to an emergency ward in a hospital suffering with
extreme pain only to be diagnosed with a terminal cancer of the oesophagus. There is no mention in his book of an after-life, no interest in the after-life or in immortality: his focus lies on the present. He was an atheist (Hitchens 2012).

By way of contrast consider Missy Buchanan. She has a faith, and can express it by using the Psalter. Explicit reference to immortal life is not to be found in her writings: consider, for example her meditation on ‘Broken Dreams’:

I don’t like the land of broken dreams.  
It’s a place where hopes for tomorrow are piled in a rusty heap.  
There are dreams of places I never got to go to,  
of careers I never had,  
of things I never did.  
It is a dumping ground strewn with the rotting remains of what might have been.  
So why do I dwell in this miserable place?  
Is it because I spend too much time looking at life in hindsight,  
lamenting each missed opportunity and every what-if?  
The world has a way of shattering fanciful hopes.  
I never sailed the Mediterranean or stood on the Eiffel Tower.  
I never became the company president or got featured on a magazine cover.  
Lord, give me this day a gentle acceptance of unfulfilled dreams.  
Help me see that my life has been full beyond measure.  
You created something more beautiful than I could ever have imagined, using the jagged shards of my broken dreams.  
You created a kaleidoscope of color that is uniquely my life.

(Buchanan, 2010 p.81-83).

She follows this with a quotation from Psalm 139.13-14 which portrays her trust in God.

For his part Moltmann touches on immortality in The Crucified God where he states that resurrection excludes any thought of eternal life.

On the other hand, ‘resurrection of the dead’ excludes any idea of ‘a life after death’ of which many religions speak, whether in the idea of the immortality of the soul or in the idea of the transmigration of souls. (Moltmann, 1974 p.170)
He leaves discussion of immortality until his 2004 work *In the End - The Beginning* where he briefly discusses the subject. He argues that any question of immortality involves the relationship of the whole person to God.

So we have two impressions. On the one hand there is nothing to which we can hold fast, not even ourselves. Everything passes away. We came naked into the world and naked we shall leave it. Death is the finish. But on the other hand, nothing is lost. Everything remains in God. (Moltmann, 2004 p.108).

Finally, we will ask what sort of person will become immortal. Is it the ageing person with so many handicaps? Is it the person with prosthesis? Is eternal life as some obituaries would tell us an endless round of golf or perpetual fishing? So immortality is pointless and of little help for ageing people. Something more is needed. The more standard practice is for Moltmann to take is to discuss the nature of death and then belief in the resurrection.
Chapter 8

The Resurrection of the Body.

We have seen that, in Moltmann’s eyes, the Christian hope stands in contradiction to the present situation. Moltmann was aware that in his own life there were times when there seemed no possibility or reason to expect any hope. Of all the possible situations in which people face death, is the final contradiction in life. There is an almost universal longing for an after-life whether it comes through re-incarnation, immortality of the soul or by resurrection. In the previous chapter we found that there are too many unanswered questions concerning reincarnation and immortality of the soul: these would leave us to experience eternity in a disembodied state. In this chapter we will look in detail at the possession of eternal life through bodily resurrection.

As people age they find that younger people are reluctant to face the fact of mortality. Missy Buchanan reflects:

On most days I’m not afraid to die.
My papers are all in order- living will and medical orders too.
The funeral home contract is prepaid.
I’ve even selected the clothes I’ll wear
and have them hanging in a plastic bag at the end of my closet.
But whenever I mention death, my family plugs their ears.
They say it’s too depressing, too morbid to discuss.
(Buchanan, 2010 p. 78).

Lloyd Bailey says that our unwillingness to talk about our own death is evident in various ways. They are:

Pervasive euphemisms, changing emphases in literature, funeral practices that move the family to the perimeter, and which disguise reality, impersonal care of and evasive conversation with the dying, ardent hopes that modern medical science will overcome death, the amount of attention given to the topic in recent philosophical writing, and even in the liturgies of the various churches. (Bailey, 1979 p.1).
For death still remains the greatest mystery facing people. It means the end of life as we know it.

Anthony Gardner writes concerning death:

This is the deepest fear, that the dissolution death brings is total, that death is an abyss of nothingness into which everything falls. “The abyss,” the “pit” … the choice of such images is not accidental. (Gardner, 2007, p.121).

There are within modern society some people who can see no future for humanity at all. They could point to such conflagrations as the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and the bombing of the World Trade Centre on 11/9/2001 when large masses of people ceased to exist - there were no remains, no bodies, and no human remains at all. We cease to exist after death- there is nothing to say that we ever existed. Tom Wright notes that “some people believe in complete annihilation, that is at least clean and tidy however unsatisfying it may be as an account of human destiny” (Wright, 2007 p. 15). This idea would appeal to those who have no faith in God, but prefer the stance of atheism.

John Polkinghorne has presented an unusual thought on annihilation, in his discussion on the topic of hell. He writes:

If hell is the place where the divine life has been deliberately excluded, then some have thought it will eventually fade away into nothingness, because the divine Spirit has habitually been denied its sustaining work in their lives. (Polkinghorne, 2002 p.137).

Moltmann sees another type of annihilation. It is the kind of death which is the consequence of human globalization coupled with proliferation of nuclear weapons: “There will be no human life after the nuclear winter” (Moltmann, 2010 p.38). Nevertheless, Moltmann also believes in the resurrection as the salvation of humanity, foiling the dismal future of humanity. “It is the resurrection into life in the midst of death” (Moltmann, 2010 p.38).

There is yet a third type of annihilation doctrine which accommodates belief in God and has remained as a minority view within the Christian Church. It holds that those who reject the
love of God do not suffer eternal torment but are simply annihilated. This doctrine was held by some patristic writers in the ancient church; hints of it appeared in the writings of Ignatius, Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus in the second century and Arnobius in the fourth century. It resurfaced in the earlier part of the 19th century under the influence of the Miller movement. In the 20th century it was supported by a number of English theologians such as Basil Atkinson, William Temple, Oliver Quick, G.B.Caird, and John Stott. Moltmann prefers to think that nothing God has created will be lost, as he wrote in his book *In the End - The Beginning*:

> If God is God, God’s relationship to his human image cannot be destroyed either through the contrariety of sin or through the death of human beings. Only God himself could dissolve the relationship he has entered into towards those he has created. (Moltmann, 2004 p. 106).

The danger with any sort of annihilationism is that it deprives ageing people of hope, particularly in the face of death. This was the part of the fear of death in significant parts of the Old Testament.

The psalmist lamented:

> I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
> I am like those who have no help.
> Like those forsaken among the dead,
> like the slain that lies in the grave,
> like those whom you remember no more,
> for they are cut off from your hand.
> You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
> In the regions dark and deep. (Psalm 88 v 3-6)

Death was not only the end of life; it separated one from the living, even from God. The Psalmist feared that while he had fellowship with God during his life, he would be forgotten by the One he had faithfully served during his life. Many people today would echo that feeling of despair, of abandonment, of hopelessness. As one contemporary writer states:

> Just as death is adorned and hidden in developed societies, resurrection is similarly disregarded. Going to a funeral is seen as a waste of time.
The idea that we rise again(!) is treated with contempt. (Irarrazabel, 2004 p. 25).

These days most people die in hospitals, hospices, or nursing homes, hidden from public view. Death is a remote event yet portrayed obscenely in the media as in genocides where bodies are lined up for viewing and in accidents where broken human bodies are covered by plastic sheeting. Even the disposal of human remains is largely not seen, being largely confined to remote crematoria, as Peter Jupp talks of the crematoria in Britain:

The consequence was that cremation, and the crematoria which were built to provide for this way of disposing of the dead, developed with little reference to Christian belief and practice (Jupp, 1997 p.27).

Traditional Christian teaching holds that physical death came as a direct result of human sin and found Scriptural evidence for their belief in Paul’s letters, especially Romans 5.12: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all for all have sinned.” This idea was developed by St.Augustine under the impetus of the Pelagian controversy, but has been challenged by contemporary thinkers such as John Polkinghorne. Nevertheless, Polkinghorne recognizes that there is something wrong with endemic humanity and provided his own interpretation on Romans 5 saying that:

Self-conscious beings could anticipate their future death, but at the same time they had become divorced from the God who is the only ground for hope of a destiny beyond that death. Thus humanity became prey to that sadness and frustration at the thought of human transience that we may call mortality. (Polkinghorne, 2002 p. 126).

While the doctrine of original sin has been the mainstream of Christianity there have been some who regard death as the natural completion of life. The treatises on the art of dying, Ars Moriendi, produced in the Middle Ages stress the need “to die in a state of grace striven of the sins of this world, was the great completion in life” (Polkinghorne, 2002 p.127). He continues with the following comment:
How differently the contemporary mind views the matter. Sudden death, that serves to eliminate the anxieties of dying, is what many people today would most wish for the ending of their lives. This attitude is an aspect of the modern taboo on mortality, locating it preferably in some sanitised and isolated hospital setting, as if it did not really exist. (Polkinghorne, 2002 p. 127).

Against this spectre of death lies the Christian hope of resurrection. Polkinghorne comments:

Christian thinking has always faced unflinchingly the reality of death … for the Christian, the darkness of death is accepted in the light of the hope of resurrection thereafter. (Polkinghorne, 2002 p.125).

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian hope in challenging the entrenched evils of society. Migliore notes that resurrection is distinct from resuscitation: the latter is the restoration of a dead person to the former existence but resurrection is “the entry upon a new state of existence” (Buckland 1963 p.412)

Polkinghorne, discussing Paul's teaching on the resurrection in his letter to the Corinthians where Paul uses the analogy of a seed ( 1 Cor. 15. 42-44), reckons that:

Paul got engaged, … with the eschatological necessity to hold in balance both continuity and discontinuity, if a credible hope is to be articulated. There must be enough continuity for persons to have their individual destinies beyond death. It is not enough to be new people with old names. Yet there must also be sufficient discontinuity to deliver us from the non-hope of the eternal return of this world of transience. (Polkinghorne, 2002, p.77).

Harris (1983) has carefully examined the use of the word resurrection in the New Testament. He sums up his argument:

We conclude that although resurrection may occasionally denote mere restoration to life, in its distinctively Christian sense it also implies transformation and exaltation. In its full theological import, therefore, resurrection signifies the raising of persons from the dead to new and permanent life in the presence of God. Such a definition applies to the resurrection of Christ and to the spiritual and somatic resurrection of believers. (Harris, 2004 p.272).
The Bible uses a variety of images to describe this new state which break down and are totally inadequate to describe fully the greatness of the resurrection world. As Tom Wright puts it:

> It is of course only through imagery, through metaphor and symbol that we can imagine the new world that God intends to make. That is right and proper. All our language about the future, as I have said, is like a set of signposts pointing through a bright mist. The signpost doesn’t provide a photograph of what we will find when we arrive, but a true indication of the direction we should be traveling in.

(Wright, 2007 p. 118).

In earlier times people found that it was easier to believe in the resurrection. At death the body was put in a coffin, lowered into the grave, to lie undisturbed until the resurrection. Some of the sculptures on medieval churches portrayed by Caroline Bynum (Bynum, 1995) show on the resurrection day the coffin being opened and the body rising. These days the situation is different: firstly through the use of cremation, some of the opposition to cremation in Britain came from sections of the Church in the late nineteenth century which felt that cremation would negate the resurrection. Secondly, with the pressure for land being placed on the cities, it has been necessary to redevelop cemeteries. Thirdly, the practice of organ transplants obscure the body - as for example, in China where the practice of using mass transplants from those condemned to be executed is widespread.

Moltmann discusses this in his 2010 work *Sun of Righteousness Arise* where he prefers to use the term resurrection to life. He extends this to include all living things:

> These universal dimensions of life get lost if we only have human beings in view. In a ‘resurrection of the flesh’ human beings will be redeemed together with the whole fabric of all the living, and the living space of the earth. Paul was still aware of this when he heard ‘the sighing of creation’ which, together with us, yearns for the redemption of the body (Romans 8.19-23) (Moltmann, 2010 p.60).

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34 In Liverpool, N.S.W a road was relocated through a cemetery: The headstones were replaced in a nearby park.
Traditionally early support for the resurrection in the Old Testament has been drawn from six references:  

36 Psalm 37.49. 73. 24  
38 Ezekiel 37 1-14  
39 Ezekiel 37 and Daniel 12.2. Later exegesis has reduced this number to only one, the verse in Daniel 12. 2: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” This is the only occasion in the Old Testament which speaks of an individual resurrection: but it is restricted to those who are faithful to God: it does not refer to a general resurrection of all. (Davies, 2000 p.570)

James Charlesworth warns against using these passages to prove that the idea of the resurrection was accepted in the Old Testament:

In past discussions of resurrection in Early Judaism and in Christian origins, the full range of options was seldom considered, and one biased opinion was often forced on complex passages. (Charlesworth, 2006 p.18).

There is a warning against relying against a simple interpretation of passages which seem to reflect belief in a resurrection and ignoring other possibilities. Also, a reader might interpret a passage which originally spoke of divine deliverance from sickness in terms of a resurrection. As Charlesworth adds:

Thus, while an Israelite composed a psalm to thank God most likely for healing from a grave illness, a Jew, centuries later, might have understood words literally. The praise would then reflect a belief in resurrection from Sheol to a postmortem existence, not on earth as experienced now, but in the age to come. (Charlesworth, 2006 p.19).

35 “O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, and remember me! If mortals die, will they live again? In Job’s view death is final (Crenshaw 2006).
36 “Your dead shall live, their corpses rise” Basically hope in a continuing national restoration, but in its final form resurrection from the dead. (Coggins).
37 “But God will ransom my soul from the power in Sheol, for he will receive me” The meaning of the verse is uncertain. (Rodd).
38 “You will guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me” Meaning of the verse is uncertain, in some way God will receive the psalmist. (Rodd)
39 The vision of the valley of the dried bones –traditionally interpreted as a prophecy of the resurrection, as in the old Negro spiritual “Dem bones, dem dry bones-----Now hear the word of the Lord,” but more probably is a metaphorical description of Israel’s return from exile (Galenbush),
By the time the apocrypha was compiled in the 2nd century B.C there was a widespread acceptance of the idea of resurrection. Inscriptions on tombs and monuments bear witness to this belief. Certainly, by the 1st century A.D belief in the resurrection was well accepted by the Pharisees, though the Sadducees denied this “as far as the Sy could see there was nothing about the resurrection from the Old Testament and specifically in the law “ (Morris 1992 p.56). So they used this attempt to trap Jesus. (Matt.22 27-33)

With the resurrection of Jesus something new has taken place - the end of time has begun, the new age has come. In Moltmann’s first work he stresses the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Later in his life, when he was 84, he again stresses the importance of Christ’s resurrection, saying:

The raising of the crucified Christ says that a new beginning has been set with his end on the cross, and with that for the world. The raising of the dead Christ says that in him the order of this mortal world has been broken through. Through his death on the cross, Christ has been taken from the living; through his resurrection he has been taken from the dead. (Moltmann, 2010 p.43).

Thus there is no resurrection without that of Jesus Christ. He is the first to be raised. The resurrection of Jesus is pivotal to Christian faith and practice, to use the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 15. 14 “And if Christ has not been raised then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith is in vain”. First of all, Moltmann claims that the risen Jesus is the same as the Crucified One:

The Lord who is believed and proclaimed at Easter therefore stands in continuity with the earthly Jesus who had come and been crucified - a continuity which must repeatedly be sought and formulated anew and can never be surrendered (Moltmann, 1967 p.199).

Then he does not debate the historical facts about Jesus’ resurrection, saying instead that the death and resurrection of Jesus challenges the very basis of history itself, saying:

If in contesting and exploring the modern concepts of reality we are wrestling for the mysterious reality of the resurrection of Jesus into the distant past, but this reality becomes the ground for questioning also
the historical means of sustaining certainty about history.

Moltmann then proceeds to discuss the existentialist interpretation of the Easter events which claims that the records of the Easter story are the accounts of the belief of the disciples rather than a concrete fact:

In this sense the events of the raising of Christ from the dead is an even which is understood only in the Modus of promise - Hence the reports of the resurrection will always have to be read eschatologically in the light of the question ‘What may I hope for?’ It is only with this third question that our remembrance and the corresponding historical knowledge are set within a horizon appropriate to the thing to be remembered. (Moltmann, 1967 p.190)

Jesus is the first to be raised, the first fruits of God’s new age, the promise of what will be:

It is then understandable, further, that Jesus’ resurrection was not seen as a private Good Friday, but as the beginning and source of that universal Good Friday, of that god-forsakenness of the world which comes to light in the deadliness of the cross. Hence the resurrection of Christ was not understood merely as the first instance of a general resurrection of the dead and as a beginning of the revelation of the divinity of God in the non-existent, but also as the source of the risen life of all believers and as a confirmation of the promise which will be fulfilled in all and will show itself in the very deadliness of death to be irresistible. (Moltmann, 1967 p. 211).

Moltmann thus stands inside a contemporary theological reserve with respect to immortality and the resurrection of the dead. He is in agreement with some older and contemporary writers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Karl Barth, Daniel Migliore, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Hans Schwartz. In 2006 James Charlesworth and C.D Elledge produced an annotated bibliography of some 45 contemporary writers on the resurrection and related matters. With the exception of John Crossan, Bishop John Spong and Anthony Flew, all believe to some extent the facts of the resurrection. John Crossan, (1964) Who Killed Jesus argues that Jesus’ body was placed in a shallow grave and subsequently eaten by wild dogs; Spong, in (1983) The Hebrew Lord, denies the resurrection of Jesus and Flew (1997) in The Resurrection Debate presents a philosophical
argument against the resurrection. Reginald Fuller, (1980) *The Formation of The Resurrection Narratives* argues that the presence of discrepancies in the gospel records indicates that they are not history, but rather an account of proclamation by the Church. Most of the writers in this bibliography talk about the resurrection of Jesus, a few discuss background material. A book by Nicolas Wright on the resurrection of Jesus *Resurrection of the Son of God* in 2003, makes a careful exegesis of primitive Christian beliefs in the resurrection, beginning with Paul.

It was Paul who was to interpret the events of Jesus’ resurrection in a new way, which was to influence Christian theology in subsequent centuries. He understood the fact of human mortality as the result of human sin, an intrusion into the original plan of God and the powerful work of the devil. Christ’s resurrection marked the defeat of the devil, through the conquest of sin and part of the renewal of the world. Lloyd Bailey remarks: “The resurrection of the dead … was part and parcel of the rebirth of the entire world.” (Bailey, 1979 p.90). In 1 Cor. 15 Paul presents the resurrection hope as the foundation for his gospel of freedom. In 1 Cor.15.26 he expresses succinctly the truth that death is defeated “The last enemy to be destroyed is death”. Death is seen as an enemy, which would destroy the works of God. In the same chapter he uses the analogy of a seed:

> And what you sow, you do not sow the body that shall be, but mere grain, perhaps of wheat or some other grain (1Cor 15.37).

We cannot tell what our resurrection bodies will be like, but we can begin to imagine what will be. For that reason artists have drawn on their imagination, in poetry, song, and painting.

It is interesting that Moltmann does not use 1 Corinthians 15 in his discussion of the resurrection, but he does use the chapter in his 1993 work, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* where he explores the nature of the Trinity. He argues that resurrection is a stage to something far greater:

> First of all the resurrection process will be brought to an end: first Christ; then Christians in Christ’s parousia; and after that death will be
destroyed, and all men and women be liberated from his power. If God exalts Christ alone to be Lord, then he must ‘reign’ over everything and everyone; otherwise God would not be God. That is why all other rulers have to be destroyed. (Moltmann, 1993 p.91).

So far we have thought in terms of resurrection as something which happens on a personal level after death. But resurrection faith has relevance in this life also, as Moltmann comments:

We already experience resurrection here and now, in the midst of life, when we rise up against death in life, against the oppressions and the hurts to which life here is subjected. In love, resurrection is not merely expected; it is already experienced. For love makes us come alive. And love never gives anyone or anything up for lost. It sees a future in which God will restore everything, and put everything to rights, and gather everything into his kingdom. This great hope strengthens our little hopes, and puts them straight. It is the presence of Jesus in the Spirit of Life. (Moltmann, 1994 p.4)

So the resurrection is not in itself the final end, but it points to something greater.
Chapter 9.

A Hope For All?

As we age we find that we become frail and aware of our limits and finitude. We are not as strong and resilient as we used to be. As Missy Buchanan observes:

But somewhere between then and now, things changed.  
My limbs became stiff, my mind less alert.  
Now I’ve come to accept the fleeting stages of old age.  
There’s no use in skirting the truth:  
If you live long enough, aching bones and slow steps will come.  
(Buchanan, 2010 pp.18-19).

In terms of faith this stage of life can heighten our concern for life beyond death. In the silence of time we reflect on the span of years we have lived. Is there life hereafter? What is its relationship to the life we have just lived? Is there any dependence on the life we have lived or whether we have made a decision to follow Christ?

Here we are coming face to face with a number of interrelated biblical and theological themes. Most have to do with predestination, salvation, and judgment; in fact, the Christian theological spectrum is broad and accompanies a range of belief and accompanying hope. We need to look at this spectrum and determine who are saved and consequently have hope: is it either a select group or every human being? Is salvation universal or is it not? If it is not universal, have some been predestined to eternal life and what happens to those who are not predestined to eternal life? What are we to make of the apocalyptic strands in Scripture?

Within the popular mind these themes play themselves out in the prospect of one’s own death and can provoke an anxiety with respect to one’s own future destiny. It is always good to hear the stories of those who died with peace and confidence. One such story relates to the passing of Frances Havergal, a prolific hymn writer of the nineteenth century. Kenneth Osbeck tells of her passing:
She looked up steadfastly, as if she saw the Lord; and surely nothing less heavenly could have reflected such a glorious radiance upon her face. For ten minutes we watched that almost visible meeting with her King, and her countenance was so glad as if she were already talking to Him! Then she tried to sing; but after one sweet, high note her voice failed, and as her brother commended her soul into the Redeemer’s hand, she passed away. (Osbeck, 1985 pp. 128-129).

The words of a verse of one of her hymns may be appropriate at this point:

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,
Never let me fall;
I am trusting Thee forever,
And for all. (Osbeck, 1985 p. 127)

There is another side to this popular understanding of death; it is not uncommon for people to take no thought of the hereafter and indeed think that there is nothing after death. A number of recent funeral services celebrate the life of the deceased but have no mention of a future life, no meeting with God. Penelope Wilcox referring to the situation in the United Kingdom, says “But many mourners perceive the funeral differently. They may wish to have no Bible readings and no prayers” (Wilcock 1997 p. 105). That which takes place after death has little place in the mind of these modern people.

Moltmann’s eschatology of hope looks beyond the limits of human life and requires a reading of hope which will ensure that eschatology permeates the whole of his theology and does not remain an appendix. Nevertheless, he will question the analytical material and the way in which it develops into theories of salvation and judgment. Traditional Christian teaching declares that it is only those who, in some way or other, are touched by God and consequently are saved from their sins that have any real hope. God’s grace meets people, and it is that grace in Christ which saves people from their sins. Nevertheless, as we have already stated, there is a wide spectrum of belief within the Christian Church, and accompanying range of hope. At one end of this spectrum there are those who believe that their presence as Christians is the direct result of
God’s pre-determined choice of them as individuals to be saved. Thomas Schreiner, in 2000, listed some thirteen contributors in his volume *Still Sovereign*. They hold to the doctrine of predestination which, according to Matthew Slick, “is the doctrine that God alone chooses (elects) who is saved”. (Slick 2012). They see God as the supreme sovereign and the One who has the absolute right and ability to do whatever He wants with His creation. They also believe that the sinfulness of humanity prevents them from freely seeking God. “He has the right to elect some to salvation and let the rest go their natural way: to hell. This is predestination” (Slick 2012).

Schreiner and Ware express this truth:

> We contend that Scripture does not teach that all people receive grace in equal measure, even though such a democratic notion is attractive today...God’s saving grace is set only upon some, namely, those whom, in his great love, he elected long ago to save, and that this grace is necessarily effective in turning them to belief. (Schreiner & Ware, 1995 p.14).

This theology is associated with John Calvin and the churches under his influence. They subscribe to a reading of the Old Testament where a small number, a remnant, escaped the disasters of foreign invasion and also cite some texts, mainly from the New Testament to support their tenets, such as John 13.16, 19.13, Eph 1.6, 1 Peter 2.9.

Through his connection with the Reformed Church, Moltmann was very well aware of this position. In his autobiography he wrote concerning this problem:

> Inwardly my thoughts turned to the fundamental idea underlying the predestination doctrine of Calvin and the Calvinists. It seemed to me that the point was not the dualistic notion of separating humanity into the elect and the dammed, the good and the evil, in order to put oneself on the right side; the heart of the doctrine was the perseverance of believers in temptation and persecutions: “He who endures to the end shall be saved,” (Moltmann, 2008 p.77).

In 1959 he wrote an essay with the title *Election and the Perseverance of Believers according to Calvin*, which developed from this earlier writing (Moltmann 2008 p77). Moltmann does not hold to the doctrine of predestination of the elect. He has a very wide scope of belief. In the
contemporary scene Moltmann thinks that there is a similar situation which sees escapism as a way out of this impasse:

Here a *religious* escapism is coming to the fore especially in the present spread of a vague Gnostic religiosity of redemption. The person who surrenders himself to this religiosity feels at home in ‘the world beyond’ and on earth sees himself merely as a guest..... It was no more than a guest, so the fate of this hostelry has nothing to do with him. (Moltmann, 2012 p. 52-53).

Again, he sees another type of religious escapism in a certain interpretation of Scripture, particularly 1 Thessalonians 4.14-17.:  

Before the great afflictions at the end of the world true believers will be ‘raptured’ ...snatched away to heaven, so that they can then build the new world with Christ at his Second Coming. All unbelievers unfortunately belong to the ‘Left Behind’, the people who are not ‘caught up’ and who will perish in the downfall of the world. (Moltmann, 2012 p.53).

Moltmann with his emphasis on the future sees a purpose in the apocalyptic writings: they are not a separation of people into the godless and ungodly; rather they are an expression of hope in the widest possible sense:

The Christian is involved in this society and does not choose to flee. The world is to be redeemed as well as the faithful individuals. Therefore, Christian eschatology must make a stand against this form of apocalyptic escapism and insist that there is hope for everyone.

The third strand in this theological spectrum is the traditional view that salvation and its accompanying hope is available for everyone who decides to believe.

Grace is distributed equally to all people, and that is why it is unlimited. The “will of man” chooses whether to submit to grace given. In this scheme the human will plays the ultimate and decisive role in personal salvation. (Schreiner& Ware, 1995 p.14).

Salvation does not depend upon divine predestination but relies on a person accepting what God has offered without any qualifications, as the words of a verse of old hymn “Rock of Ages”
expresses it:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress,
Helpless, look to thee for grace,
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour or I die.

(Salvation Army, 1986 p.242).

Again, we look at what Moltmann says concerning the temptation to refuse that which God offers:

God has exalted man and given him the prospect of a life that is wide and free, but man hangs back and lets himself down. God promises a new creation of all things in righteousness and peace, but man acts as if everything were as before and remained as before, God honours him with his promises, but man does believe himself capable of what is required of him. That is the sin which most profoundly threatens the believer It is not the evil he does, but the good he does not do, not his misdeeds but his omissions, that accuse him. They accuse him of lack of hope. (Moltmann, 1976 pp.22-23).

Such is the other side of hopelessness when a person refuses to accept what God has offered, preferring to live in a dismal state of unbelief, and as a result, fails to reach the full potential in serving God and the community. So Moltmann clearly believes that salvation, with its accompanying hope, is available to everyone who believes.

Moltmann does not discuss the fate of those who refuse to believe until his 1996 work The Coming of God. Here he discusses the subject of the Last Judgment, which was once depicted in threatening terms. In some medieval churches there are sculptures which depict the Last Judgment: on the one side angels take the righteous into eternal bliss while, on the other side, devils take the unrighteous into damnation. This sort of presentation is bad, and has had lingering effects on Christian belief, and has poisoned any ideas of a good God.
Protestant dogmatics really always enquires merely about the outcome of the Last Judgment. Is there a ‘double outcome’ – believers into heavenly bliss, unbelievers into the torments of hell? Or all in the end, all saved, and all things brought under the new creation? Behind this question is the question about God. Does God, as their creator, go with all his created beings into life, death, and resurrection – or does God as judge stand over against those he has created, detached and uninvolved, to pardon or to condemn? (Moltmann, 1996 p.236).

The traditional position is that those who reject God’s salvation and continue in wicked living will be punished forever. As Tom Wright says:

   The traditional picture is clear: such human beings will continue to be, in some sense human beings, and they will be punished in endless time. (Wright, 2007 p.193).

This position is opposed by those who believe that all people will be saved. And so we find a fourth strand in the Christian spectrum, that of universal salvation, which stands in contrast to the restrictive tenets of Calvinism, and of the more traditional beliefs and teaches that all people will be ultimately saved. This position is still the one held by people today who refer to the deceased as “looking down” upon their loved ones. Originally the doctrine began with Origen, who believed that even the Devil would be redeemed and ultimately saved.

However, it was condemned in the early church under the influence of Augustine, together with imperial support, but re-emerged in the seventeenth century among the pietist groups in Germany who studied the Bible, rather than the tenets of Humanism. (Moltmann 1996,p237-328.) Later revival movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the Blumhardt’s universalism emerged.

   Universalism became the ‘confession of hope’. The expectation of Christ’s imminent parousia, experiences of the present powers in healings of the sick, and hope for the whole world: all these belonged together here. (Moltmann, 1996 p.238).

Tom Wright feels that there has been a massive swing towards universalism in the mainstream churches over the last two hundred years (Wright 2007 p 190).
Both sides accept biblical support for their positions. Moltmann examines the texts for both positions and concludes:

Universal salvation and a double outcome of judgment are therefore well attested biblically. So the decision for the one or the other cannot be made on the ground of ‘scripture’. (Moltmann, 1996 p.241).

I feel that Moltmann is somewhat ambiguous on this point; at times he holds to the traditional view, at other times he leans towards universalism.

Damnation is there, but it is temporary. The Last Judgment, which consigns unbelievers to hell, is not a permanent sentence, but an opportunity to remove anything that is not godly. Again, with his theological emphasis on the future, Moltmann writes:

The eschatological point of the proclamation of ‘the Last Judgment’ is the redeeming kingdom of God. Judgment is the side of the eternal kingdom that is turned towards history. In that Judgment all sins, every wickedness and every act of violence, the whole injustice of the murderous and suffering world, will be condemned, and annihilated, because God’s verdict effects what it pronounces. In the divine Judgment all sinners, the wicked and the violent, the murderers and the children of Satan, the Devil and the fallen angels will be liberated and saved from their deadly perdition through transformation into their true, created being, because God remains true to himself, and does not give up what he has once created and affirmed, or allow it to be lost. (Moltmann, 1996 p. 255).

Hell is not thus a place of permanent abode; it is only temporary.

Moltmann denies the belief that hell is a place where all of the unbelievers are sent as a result of the divine decree at the Last Judgments. He writes:

The logic of hell seems to me not merely inhumane but also extremely atheistic: here the human being in his freedom of choice is his own lord and god. His own will is his heaven – or his hell. God is merely the accessory who puts me there; if I decide for heaven, God must put me there. If I decide for hell, he has to leave me there. If God has to abide by our own free decision, then we can do with him what we like. (Moltmann, 1999 p.45).
Part of the problem in trying to reconcile the different views of predestination is the lack of any rigorous theology in recent times. Wright reckons:

The problem is that much theology, having for so long lived on the convenience food of an easygoing tolerance of everything, an ‘inclusivity’ with as few boundaries as McWorld, has become depressingly flabby, unable to climb even the lower slopes of social and cultural judgment, let alone the steep upper reaches of that judgment of which the early Christians spoke and wrote. (Wright, 2007 p.191).

Whatever we think of Moltmann’s ideas on universal salvation and his teaching on Hell in fact, we may not agree with his viewpoint but it is clear that there is within his thinking a really broad basis for hope. Because God welcomes all, hope is for everyone, not just a select few. More than humanity there is hope for all creation in the words of Fanny Crosby:

To God be the glory, great things he hath done!  
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son;  
Who yielded his life an atonement for sin,  
And opened the life gate that all may go in  
(Salvation Army, 1986 p.18).
Chapter 10

A Cosmic Hope.

It is not surprising that those who are ageing have a concern for an individual and personal hope. The very nature of eschatology emerges as we think about life after death conceived within a Christian understanding of resurrection. The ageing Moltmann is well aware of the dimensions of hope, but his theological concern at large transcends the life of an individual and humanity in general. Moltmann’s hope embraces all creation. This concern began in the Hamburg fire burning, continued through his exposure to the Holocaust, and stayed with him till the end of human life.

That Moltmann should have this passion demonstrates his concern for legacy. It is not uncommon for those who are ageing to consider what sort of world we may be leaving for the younger generation, who come after us. In Moltmann’s case he did not retire; being a theologian of hope he has continued to write and lecture in a secular, multi-faith world which is under threat.

There is the thought that a massive conflagration will completely destroy the world and the people in it. There are three passages in the New Testament, namely 2 Peter 3.7 “But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire,” and 2 Peter 3.10 and 2 Peter 3.12 which describe the destruction of the earth at the second coming of Christ. On this point Donald Senior writes:

Reference to destruction of the world through fire…is rare in the N.T and is usually a metaphor for punishment of the unjust …this may also indirectly reflect the influence of the Stoic belief that the universe would endlessly cycle through destruction by fire to be followed by the creation of a new universe. (Senior, 2003 p.2193).

Michael Green discusses this point in his commentary on 2 Peter and Jude and concludes that
“The main point of it all is not the apocalyptic imagery, but the moral implications of the parousia” (Green, 1968 p.152).

John Polkinghorne argues that such a scenario is possible. On an astronomical basis he argues the earth could well be destroyed by a cosmic conflagration, writing: “The solar system is a dangerous environment, full of threats” (Polkinghorne, 2002 p.7). Moltmann does not discuss the astronomical situation; he focuses his attention on humankind. In his 2008 book, A Broad Place, and in his 2012 Ethics of Hope, he does discuss the ecological crisis which faces humanity, with overpopulation, the urbanization of humanity with accompanying pressure on resources coupled with extreme pollution. He writes: “Human destruction of nature is based on a disturbed relationship to nature” (Moltmann, 2012 p.132).

The early Lutheran theologians felt that annihilation would be the final destiny of the world, leaving the angels and redeemed humans to enjoy the beautiful vision of God. Redeemed people no longer need the world; it is unnecessary scaffolding due to be burnt up. Moltmann argues against this fate of the universe. Modern Lutheran theologians have moved towards transformation of the cosmos rather than its conflagration. Moltmann, of course, stands within the Reformed tradition which looks back to Calvin. He holds to the Calvinist theology of the seventeenth century. It is a tradition which taught that God would not annihilate the world through fire, rather making out of the present world a new heaven and a new imperishable world.

In the new bodiliness of the saved there will be a glorification in the communication of eternal, intransient life, for they will be made like in form to ‘Christ’s glorious body’ (Phil.3.21). Calvinist theology sees continuity between the graces of Christ experienced in history and glory of Christ experienced in the consummation. (Moltmann, 2004 p.271).
Moltmann has also identified a range of catastrophes in the modern world, brought about by people themselves, ranging from genocides, including terrorism and nuclear accidents. Describing the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, where a nuclear accident destroyed a nuclear power plant in the U.S.S.R., he writes:

> We are only discovering today and slowly at that, what Chernobyl really means: 8,000 to 10,000 dead; more than 50,000 fatally contaminated; Chernobyl’s children handicapped and born for an early death; a third of White Russia and parts of the Ukraine uninhabitable and shut off. The costs are proliferating indefinitely and incalculably. (Moltmann, 1994 p.89).

Moltmann is a theologian of hope, however. The various catastrophes which face the world are for him not the end of civilization as we know it, but rather come as harbingers of hope:

> The biblical apocalypses are not pessimistic scenarios of a global catastrophe which merely disseminate fear and terror so that human beings are paralyzed by the corresponding belief in their doom. These apocalypses are messages of hope in danger, an encouragement to see the danger clearly and to resist it. They keep alive hope in the faithfulness of God. (Moltmann, 2004 p. 51).

Moltmann traces the trajectory of disasters in the Scriptures and in every case they point to something much better. So beyond the times of threats and disaster in the modern world he sees hope. As he writes:

> The biblical apocalypses and catastrophic theologies have nothing to do with the fantasies of global annihilation conceived by the modern prophets of disaster and the terrorists. They are teachers of hope. (Moltmann, 1996 p.51-52)

Moltmann was invited to give the prestigious Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh for 1984-5. He suggested a theme of doctrine of creation coupled with exploration of a theology of nature. This marked a new direction from the individual eschatology to that of a broader scale. As preparation for the lectures he prepared the manuscript which was published in 1985 under the title *God in Creation*. He followed this in 1993 with *The Way of Jesus Christ* and, later in 1996
with *The Coming of God.* In 2004 he continued the theme of cosmic salvation with a book designed for general reading *In The End - The Beginning* where he says that catastrophes are not the final end of the world but part of God’s plan for the world. In 2010, he published the more scholarly work entitled *Sun of Righteousness Arise! God’s Future for Humanity and the Earth,* which portrays the vision of God’s righteousness. In 2012 he wrote *Ethics of Hope* in which he discusses ethics for earth. In these volumes he moves beyond personal salvation and incorporates the cosmic side of eschatology. In his 1993 volume he writes “Unless nature is healed and saved, human beings cannot be healed and saved either” (Moltmann, 1993 p.274). Later, he expounded this theme by saying that, unless the redemption of the cosmos is included, we are left with a Gnostic redemption:

Christian eschatology must be broadened out into cosmic eschatology, for otherwise it becomes a Gnostic doctrine of redemption, and is bound to teach, no longer the redemption of the world but a redemption from the world, no longer the redemption of the body but a deliverance of the soul from the body. (Moltmann, 1996 p.259).

In scientific terms any attempt to study the cosmos can present difficulties for the thinking person, because the scientific studies are based on empirical principles. The temptation here is to divorce the study of eschatology and science. However, modern theology must become involved in the study of science, otherwise eschatology becomes a Gnostic myth. According to the Biblical account, God saw that which He created and assessed it as being good. “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1.31). So this good creation was spoilt by human sin as we read in the primeval account: “Cursed is the ground because of you: in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Genesis 3.17). This sentence was followed by the expulsion of the human couple from Eden.

Moltmann starts his Gifford lectures on natural theology and creation with a discussion of the ecological problems, then moves on to discuss the time and space of creation, the ultimate
glorification of human beings and concludes with a discussion on the Sabbath. We would have expected further development of the Creator God, but Moltmann concludes with a dissertation on the Sabbath. It seems an odd sort of a way of ending the lectures, for one would have expected a further activity from such an active God. But Moltmann is concerned to point out that the Sabbath and the Christian feast day, Sunday are both incomplete, “The dream of completion” still awaits the completion of the dream” (Moltmann, 1985 p.294).

Moltmann commences his dissertation on the Sabbath by stating that the emphasis in the Western Church lay on the creation in six days, the seventh, the Sabbath was a day of rest.

The ‘completion’ of creation through ‘the seventh day’ is much neglected, or even overlooked altogether. It would seem as if Christian theology considered that both the Sabbath commandment to Israel and the sabbath of creation were repealed and discarded when Jesus set aside the sabbath commandment by healing the sick on that day. (Moltmann, 1985 p.276).

Moltmann goes on to explore the Genesis account saying that the six days of creation were each followed by a night but the seventh was not followed by a night.

If we look at the biblical traditions that have to do with the belief in creation, we discover that the Sabbath is not a day of rest following six working days. On the contrary: the whole work of creation was performed for the sake of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is ‘the feast of creation’ … God’s sabbath knows no night but became the ‘feast without end’. (Moltmann, 1985 p.277).

Moltmann then exegetes the creation story, not by any reference to Genesis 1 but by using a rather obscure text, Exodus 31.17; “It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six working days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed”. Moltmann admits that God’s rest and refreshment is an odd way of completing the
creation story. In using this metaphor firstly the creator stands apart from His creative activity and returns to himself:

In his creative activity he was free for his works, which are in accordance with himself; in his sabbath rest he becomes free from his works again, and returns to himself ... after creation he comes to himself again—only not without his creation but with it. (Moltmann, 1985 p. 278-279).

Secondly, the creator lets creation exist; rather than destroying the world by a conflagration He permits his creation to exist:

He also lets his creation exist before his face and co-exist with himself: a finite, temporal world co-exists with the infinite, eternal God. So the world is not merely created by God; it also exists before God and lives with God. By coming to his rest, God lets his creation be what it is on its own account. (Moltmann, 1985 p.279).

Finally, He is present in all his works:

The God who rests in face of his creation does not dominate the world on this day: he ‘feels’ the world; he allows himself to be affected, to be touched by his creatures. He adopts the community of creation as his own milieu. (Moltmann, 1985, p. 279).

The adoption of the Sabbath is not merely obedience to a divine commandment; it is a foretaste of what will be as he wrote in his book God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation:

And when men and women rest from their human works, this becomes a fore-token of eternal feast of the divine glory. The Sabbath is not a day of creation; it is ‘the Lord’s day.’ (Moltmann, 1985 p. 280).

In the 2010 book Sun of Righteousness Arise! he discusses the resurrection of nature. While in the enlightenment period of the eighteenth century the world was regarded in purely mechanical terms, later philosophy moved away from this thinking and regarded nature as inexorably linked with humanity. So he writes
Human beings who long for ‘deliverance from the body’ will find fellowship with the creation which sighs under transience and yearns for the glory of God. (Moltmann, 2010 p.72.)

The resurrected human beings will need a place to live: if not, they would be risen spirits living in a celestial paradise. This means that the earth will also be renewed. Moltmann notes “God does not save his creation for heaven, he renews the earth” (Moltmann, 2010 p.72).

Moltmann subsequently lamented that the church restriction of the relevance of Christ’s work to humanity was regrettable

The church has to represent the whole cosmos, so it must bring before God the ‘groanings of creation’ (Rom. 8.19 ff.) as well as hope for the coming of God to everything created. The non-human creations are members of the church just as the angels….consequently believers will draw reverence for all created being into their worship of God (Moltmann 2012 p.139).

We then move onto a discussion of the Millennium. The biblical basis of this is found in Revelation 20.1-6, where Christ shall reign for a thousand years before the final end comes. This is a subject long ignored by the churches and, in recent years, has been the subject of renewed interest by theologians, yet one which has divided Evangelical Protestant Christians. Donald Bloesch writes, “The millennial promise basically refers to a hope within history and is therefore a penultimate rather than an ultimate hope” (Bloesch, 2004p.88). Moltmann favours millenarianism, but makes a distinction between historic and eschatological millenarianism: the former is a religious theory intended to support and legitimize political or ecclesiastical power, whereas the latter is matter of hope in the face of resistance. Moltmann observes:

Millenarianism must be firmly incorporated into eschatology. Detached from eschatology, and simply by itself, it leads to the catastrophes of history. But incorporated in eschatology it gives strength to survive and resist. (Moltmann, 1996 p. 192).
In this way Moltmann moves millenarianism into the realm of eschatology and makes it a topic of hope. In his teaching on creation Moltmann moves beyond the traditional proof of Divine creation and looks ahead to the final chapter in the salvation drama when God’s new presence will be the most important feature of the new world:

In the final visions of the book of Revelation, heaven descends to the earth. The earth becomes the city which holds paradise within itself. This city becomes the place open to all. In this place God’s Shekinah finally comes to rest. In its rest, all created beings find their eternal happiness. For this ‘the Spirit and the Bride’ call in the unrest of history and in the sufferings of this present time. (Moltmann, 1996, p.319).

The prophets of old looked forward to the day when all of the enmity between species will be no more and creation itself groans with keen anticipation for that day, as Paul writes:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. (Romans 8. 19-22).

So the world is not to be destroyed by fire but will share in this hope of being in the presence of God Himself in a new Creation, and those who have no hope, whom society has discounted because of age and infirmity are excluded can have this hope of seeing God in the New Jerusalem.

So in Moltmann’s theology there is an extremely wide broad spectrum of hope. There is hope for all of humanity, for all of creation. In the words of Isaac Watts:

The whole creation join in one
To bless the sacred name
Of him that sits upon the throne And to adore he Lamb

(Salvation Army, 1986. p.4)
We commenced this chapter by looking at the wider hope of the whole creation and the involvement of future generations and of both the animate and inanimate parts of the world. Moltmann’s writings on eschatology declare that there is a future for all of creation. Those who are ageing need have no fear of the future, or for the legacy which they will leave behind, for they share in the newness which God has promised for all creation.
Chapter 11

Conclusion - God’s Final Reign

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore what kind of hope may be available to ageing men and women. It is a thesis which has been constructed in a culture where more people are living longer and yet there is a sense in which society is oriented towards the merits of being younger. This dissertation did not want to focus on the pastoral care of the aged or delivery of services to them. The past decades have seen a veritable growth in what might be called the ageing industry. The purpose instead was to explore what such a hope might look like from a theological vantage point. It is a thesis then that has been concerned with a dimension of faith seeking understanding-and done so through the context of growing older.

There has been an increasing interest in the relationship between theology and hope in recent times. The anthology edited by Mostert is an example of such. There has been little attempt though to consider such a theological emphasis in the light of the inevitable experience of ageing. There has also been much more of an emphasis on the spirituality of ageing. For this theological purpose Moltmann was selected, but here a further proviso must be made. Moltmann himself has not written so far a theology of hope from the perspective of growing older. For his whole theological career he has been known as one of the significant twentieth century theologians of hope. The reason why he was selected for this purpose is because he himself is an ageing theologian. Now well into his 80s he continues to write on hope — and at the same time in recent decades he has written more about himself and his companion experiences. For that reason Moltmann becomes more than a useful foil.

In the course of writing this thesis I have drawn upon a good range of Moltmann’s writings. In every one of them hope has been an organizing principle. Now it is not likely, of
course, that many of those who are ageing will read Moltmann for themselves. Moltmann is not a populist writer. He is a serious theologian who deals with the complexities and the controversies of the discipline, which will remain beyond the grasp of those whom Jeff Astley describes as “ordinary believers”. Nevertheless, his theology has consequences and implications for those who are growing older. This thesis has striven to be dialogical in a sense. It has wanted to engage with aspects of Moltmann’s own theology, while at the same time reflecting on the experience of ageing, both from the perspective of those who inhabit this space and those who have made use of other disciplines to study its nature. This thesis, then, is not a normal study of Moltmann’s theology. Moltmann is being applied.

For two millennia Christians have prayed “Your kingdom come, Your will be done” (Mt 5.10). While Moltmann does not specifically mention the Lord’s Prayer the ultimate goal of our discussion on hope in the latter stages of life could be found in that ancient prayer, for when His kingdom comes, and when God will be the ultimate ruler over a new earth and a new heaven, all that which causes doubt and despair will be no more.

With the losses and deprivations of age older people can look forward to the answer to that prayer. The victims of crime, the atrocities of the world as well as the ruined and devastated nature cry out for that prayer to be answered. The Lord’s Prayer, is of course, eschatological in its nature and aspiration as Dominic Crossan states. It looks to the coming and fulfillment of the kingdom of God.

Governments and other authorities have begun to address the problem of ageing only to find that it is too big for people and complex to handle. This rite of passage is a problem which is intensifying as more people are living longer. Churches and Christian pastors have tried to provide help for elderly people, but it is an insufficient attempt to meet this problem. The purpose of the
church is to provide pastoral care to the terminally ill people and even in the face of death itself. Such a purpose differs from the demands faced by the church, in growth and institutional survival.

We have traced the phantoms of generic hopes only to prove them empty and ineffective in the face of human sinfulness and stupidity. We have tried to improve the quality of life in older age and to extend our lives, only to find that the grim spectre of death awaits all. The purpose of this thesis has also been designed to consider a framework of understanding for those whose prospects are declining with the onset of older age. There is a theological task here requiring attention. Moltmann’s theology has been invoked for this necessary task.

As older people we are near the end, our life has run is course, our ways are set. There is nothing more to achieve. But Juergen Moltmann’s extensive writings claim that this is not so:

Wherever life is perceived and lived in community and fellowship with Christ, a new beginning is discovered in every end. What it is I do not know, but I have confidence that the new beginning will find me and raise me up. (Moltmann, 1996 p. xi).

Moltmann is here recognizing that there is a sense of finitude to our lives: that there are endings. But at the same time there are the beginnings and what that might involve is embraced in mystery. The category of hope always transcends what we already know and experience.

As a young man Juergen Moltmann faced problems of defeat and disillusionment as a prisoner of war. He found a God who also suffered a very cruel death, a death on the Cross. Yet this God promised a new life, a resurrection, and a new world. This promissory God became his constant companion through his whole life. In old age he is still writing, his exploration of eschatology is, for him, a grand adventure. He found a very real hope, far beyond his mortal life is the promise of the One who said that he was the resurrection and the life. In one of his writings, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, he refers to a painting by Paul Klee depicting two angels, one looking to the wreckage of humanity in the past, the other to the good and brilliant future. Ageing
people may choose to look back at their lives lived, and with achievement, there may be opportunities lost, hopes unfulfilled and relationships ruined and destroyed. On the other hand, ageing people may choose to look at a brilliant future given by God in a way which surpasses all human imagination. In *The Trinity And The Kingdom* (pp.90-94), Moltmann exegetes 1 Cor 15.22-25 and argues that resurrection is but a stage to the ultimate rule of God over all. This is the future which awaits all creation, which is echoed in the prayer “Your kingdom come.” He concludes his discussion on the New Jerusalem in his 1996 book *The Coming of God* and referring to Revelation 22 says:

The presence of the divine life becomes the inexhaustible source of creaturely life, which thereby becomes the source of life eternal…it its rest, all created beings find their eternal happiness. (Moltmann, 1996 p.319).

So in his writings there is a very real hope for people who have travelled down the long path of life.
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